THE DAWN OF RELIGION IN THE MIND OF THE CHILD

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A STUDY OF CHILD LIFE

BY

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PREFACE

In a previous book—*The Dawn of Character*—I endeavoured to interpret the experiences of a child of our own day and generation, brought up amid happy and sympathetic surroundings. One chapter only in that book dealt with the dawn of the child's religious life: the book was mainly concerned with the development of his mind, his habits of action, his imagination, and his will. Yet complete development—of character as well as of intelligence—can, I believe, only be attained, when all these are dedicated to the highest ends: that is, when *life is inspired by a religious purpose.*

I have therefore tried, in the following pages, to develop in greater detail the thoughts suggested in that single chapter; and to show the lines along which the religious development of the child takes place, as the initial impulse towards good, possessed in some degree by every child, is gradually strengthened into habit, setting free an increasing store of spiritual energy, which seeks its fulfilment in a righteous life, in which there is a conscious relation between the child and God.

The illustrations, gathered together from many and varied sources, are drawn from real life : these have been arranged and interpreted in the light of my own experience, in the endeavour to show that—in the child's spiritual nature, as in his physical and mental nature—there is an orderly process of development. Not the exact method by which any particular group of children have been taught, but how fuller knowledge would suggest that they should be taught, I have tried also to embody here.

I have not attempted to justify or to prove the fundamental religious truths which I believe to lie at the foundation of the child's religious life. In all times and in all countries, as instinctively as men who have lost their way in the darkness grope their way towards the light, so have they, in the midst of the seen, grouped their way towards the Unseen. To say that there is no Unseen, or to act as if we believed in no Unseen, is to claim that the physical eye can see, and the physical ear can hear, all that there is in Nature around—a stupendous claim, which can never be established. I believe that, by a direct knowledge which, to those who experience it, is more convincing than any other knowledge, right down through the ages men have known God ; and, in their experience there is a unanimity such that we can justly claim

that these fundamental truths of religion are the spiritual heritage of our race and of our time.

This book is primarily a mother's book; but it appeals also to teachers, and particularly to those in our elementary and preparatory schools. In many homes, it is difficult—sometimes practically impossible—for the mother to undertake the responsibility which, under ideal circumstances, would be her own. Moreover, in all homes, the mother of necessity shares with others the responsibility of her children's upbringing. The larger half of most children's working day is spent in school; and, in their leisure time, varied occupations outside the home-life bring them, even then, under other influences than home. Closer co-operation than at present exists between home and school, and between the home and these other agencies, is therefore essential, for the difficulty of maintaining for the child the attitude of the home increases with each year, if the influences of the school and these other outside agencies are not in close accord.

Not only are such agencies often called upon to extend the influence of the home, but they are often required to take its place. Moreover, in every case, the child needs to realise that there is no department in life in which religion has no concern, no one day in the week which alone is set apart for it.

I appeal, then, for a sympathetic consideration of

the religious attitude taken up in this book, not only to those upon whom the responsibility for a child's religious training is commonly held to rest—but to *all* who are in any way brought into contact with children, and especially to the teachers in our day schools, and to the leaders of the Boy Scout, the Girl Guide, and other similar movements.

To discover the laws which underlie the child's spiritual growth out of the mass of material gathered together, though far from easy, has been a happy task, in the accomplishing of which my thanks are due, above all, to my husband. Throughout the writing of the book, he has helped me to weigh and to test my conclusions, and, by his sympathy and encouragement, has lessened the many difficulties. I owe him more than I can express.

In conclusion, I desire also to thank the Rev. G. Erskine Nicol and Mr. A. H. Hope,[1] both of whom have helped with many valuable suggestions; and the Editors of the *Sunday School Chronicle* and *Child Life* for permission to use portions of articles which have already appeared in their pages.

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[1] Joint author, with Mr. Norwood of Bristol, of *The Higher Education of Boys in England*.

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INTRODUCTION

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THE Dawn of Religion, from the point of view of the gradual development of the child's mind, has not been dealt with, as far as I am aware, by either the teacher or the psychologist. Professor Sully has an interesting chapter, in his *Studies of Childhood*, on the dawn of theological ideas; but his illustrations are, for the most part, descriptions of efforts on the part of parents and teachers to implant, in the child's mind, abstract ideas which he is not yet capable of receiving. Such efforts result in confusion and unreality rather than in any progressive mental expansion. Such, indeed, is the chaotic condition of thought revealed that Professor Sully

feels bound to conclude his chapter with these words: "I think it is about time to ask whether parents are doing wisely in thus adding to the perplexing problems of early years."

But is the postponement of all teaching on the subject, until the child is older, a satisfactory way out of the difficulty? And, even if it works in practice, is it the best way? Those of us who believe in the fundamental importance of religion, and who believe further that the spiritual impulse, the capacity for religion, which each child possesses in some degree to begin with, can be starved in early years for lack of nourishment, would prefer to ask whether all such teaching need be postponed; whether it may not be our present lack of method which is responsible for the confusion rather than—as Professor Sully seems to suggest—the nature of the subject taught.

The fact is that we do not, for the most part, realise the need for our own special preparation before we venture to teach religion to our children, or even to answer their questions on the subject. To understand and answer children's questions is, as Professor Sully says, "a considerable art, including both a large and deep knowledge of things and a quick, sympathetic insight into the little questioners' minds." We, teachers of children, need to have, not only clearer ideas as to what we ourselves believe, but

also some special knowledge of child-nature in the different stages of its development.

I have, therefore, attempted, in this little book, to trace the growth of the child's religion during the first nine or ten years of his life, in the same way that we are accustomed to trace the growth of his mind, his imagination, or his will. As I watch and compare, certain definite stages of development seem to me to stand out with ever-increasing clearness; and if this observation be correct, it follows that our method of religious teaching, in these early years, should depend on a recognition of these stages.

But there is one difficulty inseparable from speaking in this way of the development of the child's religion, which we are not called upon to face when speaking of the development of his imagination or his will—namely that, whereas most people have fundamentally the same idea of what is meant when we speak of a child's imagination or will, each one has his own special conception of what is meant by religion. Is it, then, possible, in such a case, to deal with the subject in any way which is likely to be regarded as generally satisfactory? Is there any underlying principle upon which, when rooted deep in early childhood, we can, so to speak, graft, in later years, whatever we ourselves believe to be also an essential matter?

" And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, Which is the first commandment of all?

" And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord:

" And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first commandment.

" And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these."

If the child-mind can attain to a knowledge, and if the child-heart can experience a love, of a Father to Whom we owe all, from Whom " cometh our help," with Whom it is possible for us to enter into conscious communion; and if, in childhood, there arises further the conviction, that it is our bounden duty, in working for man, to render to God whole-hearted service, have we not helped to establish a sure foundation on which to build his religion ?

It is along these lines that I have endeavoured to trace the child's religious development for these first few years. Until he is older, more definite theology is only likely to confuse. In religion, as

in all else, we need to keep closely in touch with the child's world of thought, and the simplest realities are all that, as yet, he needs. In and out of the general fabric of his religious growth, we can, if we will, interweave the knowledge and love of Christ. Most of us, probably, would desire so to do; for—whether He is for us only the Greatest of Teachers, or whether He is felt to be the Incarnation of the Divine, seen once in the flesh and still in communion with man—for most of us, He stands Supreme as a unique Manifestation of God.

For myself, holding the latter view, I would lead the child, through Christ, to the Father; in Christ, I would show him the Father; in the humanity of Christ, I would have God's transcendence draw near. But, in so doing, I should only expand, and not at any point depart from, the main plan of teaching outlined in this book. Thus, would the plan of a natural development be renewed in strength, "clothed with the tender grace of the wondrous ministry of the Son of Man." Did I not state my position, by acknowledging Jesus for myself as the Way, the Truth, the Life; the Light of God "in the fullness of time gathered into life that simple folk could see," for me, its teaching would be gravely incomplete. Following the Master along His lonely way; pondering on His gracious

words, which ever reveal afresh the "eternal beauty of earthly things"—I would have the little children, night after night, live in thought with Jesus, that they too, like the disciples of old, might hear the Master calling—"Follow Me."

CHAPTER I

THE CHILD'S FIRST KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

The contents of the infant's mind—Repetition of his experiences—Retention and gradual recognition—The slow growth of knowledge—(*a*) of the world in which he lives, (*b*) of the Unseen World—The child's knowledge of God compared with his other knowledge—Influence of the mother's prayer—Other early religious influences—Gradual growth of a sense of the reality of the Unseen—Merely to be "told about" God is not to "know" God—The importance of realising the time-element in the growth of knowledge and of love.

In his cradle by the fireside, just awakened from a refreshing sleep, lies a tiny babe a few days old. Gazing into the distance, quite still he lies, only his wee fingers moving restlessly, as he stares fixedly before him. What does he see? What do we suppose is passing through his little mind? Though he looks so wise and thoughtful to our tender and reverent gaze, we know that, in reality, he sees at first nothing definite, that as yet his "thinking" in no way corresponds to ours. His ears are capable of receiving vibrations of sound, his eyes are capable of receiving vibrations of light, his body is sensitive to touch, and to feelings of warmth and cold—but, as yet, he has no power to discriminate between

them. In the sense in which we are accustomed to use the word "knowledge," he as yet knows nothing. All that is most familiar to us—space, time, movement, the very existence of persons and things outside—is unknown to him.

> "Hardly (he seems) a life at all;
> Only a something with hands and feet;
> Only a feeling that things are warm;
> Only a longing for something to eat."

And even of that feeling of warmth, and of that longing for food, he is as yet unconscious. Lying there, snug and warm, his little mind is wholly filled with a vague sense of comfort, the result of the intimate blending of these various sensations of light, sound, touch, and bodily feeling.

But quickly a change is wrought: during the first twelve months of the baby's life, he is said to learn more than in any period of twelve years later. For, as day after day, week after week, at regular intervals, in the same order, the same experiences are repeated—experiences connected with his bathing, his feeding, his dressing and undressing, his goings out and his comings in—as a result of the power, which every healthy baby possesses as a birthright, unconsciously to observe, to remember, and to compare, he begins to recognise, and, as it were, to "sort out" his various impressions, until gradually, before the first year of his life is over, he has already

formed some distinct conception of the wonderful world in which he lives.[1]

It is as a result of this slow and unconscious sifting-out of repeated experiences that he learns about the world around him, and the world within him. But the chief question of importance for us now is —how can he acquire knowledge of a *spiritual* world—knowledge of such a kind as to make the childish prayers which, in all probability, he is taught to repeat, when he is about three or four years old, *real* to him, and not a mere form of words ? How is it possible for him to learn anything about an Unseen God ?

The tiny baby, now a few months old, is lying awake in his cradle, ready for his evening sleep : his mother is kneeling beside him, her head reverently bowed, her hand holding his in her warm, soft clasp. She is praying to God—praying that He will care for her baby through the coming night, care for him in the coming years of youth and manhood. The touch of her hand, the sound of her voice, the sight of her face, as she kneels there in the soft firelight, from the first, in some dim way, vaguely modify the contents of his little mind—even though, as yet, he can understand nothing of what it all means. Still,

[1] For fuller treatment, see *The Dawn of Character*, Ch. III., "The Growth of the Child's Mind."

as each night she prays ; as each night, month after month, this same group of sense impressions has been passively received in his baby brain, invariably registered, then unconsciously analysed and compared, gradually the group, as a whole, stands out in his mind with a certain degree of definiteness. In the same way, he had come to know the sequence of events associated with his bath and his feeding ; had come to know his mother, his father, his toys—so far the process of acquiring knowledge has been the same : first, observation and recollection, then comparison.

Yet, from the very beginning, there is a difference between his knowledge of this particular group of impressions associated with prayer, and those other groups which early entered into his childish experience—groups which were connected with his goings out and comings in, his feeding, his bathing, his dressing. As these various groups of impressions had gradually become clear to him, we might have noticed that they were, at the same time, associated in his mind with certain definite *feelings*, either of gladness or distress. These feelings were the outcome of his *own* experience ; that is, of experience received by a baby who showed—even in babyhood —a certain distinct temperament of his own. Thus, in a timid baby, the sight of the bath aroused a feeling of distress associated with fear ; whereas, in a

more normal baby, it aroused only a consciousness of gladness, associated with the splash of the water, the joy of nakedness before the fire. Some babies, as we know, even from the first, are more generally responsive than others ; our joy becomes more quickly their joy ; our vexation, their distress. To such a one we talk " baby nonsense," and at once his little face lights up, and in his delight he " chuckles" back at us. We frown at him for some infant misdemeanour, and he, catching our mood in a flash, puckers his wee face pitifully, while tears draw near the surface ! The emotional element thus aroused in him in response to our emotion is then associated, by the power of memory, with the group of impressions to which it belongs.

Is it not clear then, that, *from the first, there must be a difference between the growth of the child's knowledge of God and his knowledge of other matters* —a difference more marked, according to the child's natural responsiveness, and according to his native spiritual endowment ? For when his mother *prays*, her attitude, her tone of voice, her expression of face, the very touch of her hand, are different from what they are at any other time and under any other circumstances : and to this difference the child instinctively responds. Silently and unconsciously, *her* reverence, *her* love, communicated to him, in some strange and exquisite way, along the chords of

human sympathy, call forth in him, almost from the first, feelings akin to her own. What she feels, he, too, begins to feel : and a child is capable of religious feeling, long before he is capable of religious thought.

Various influences combine to strengthen this feeling. When, on Sundays, he and his mother listen to the solemn pealing of the organ outside the church door ; or when, in the evening, she plays to him in the soft firelight—again and again, the sacred music arouses and deepens within him the same quiet sense of awe, which he experiences each night when his mother prays. Then, as he grows older, at night he kneels by her side, his head bent reverently, as she has taught him, over his folded hands. The emotion of reverence is sustained, held together, as it were, by the attitude of reverence, as water is held in a cup : and the gentle folding of the hands, the kneeling attitude, the quietness, all combine to deepen in his little soul the religious feeling.

Then, gradually, this feeling is welded into an ever-closer intimacy with his growing thought, by the use of language on the part of up-grown folk. For always, when his mother prays, she speaks to One Whom she calls God : and as he becomes able to understand, she tells him that it is God Who has made the daisies, the lovely sunshine, the wee kitten with which he loves to play ; that it is God

Who has sent him as a gift to Mother to make them both so glad! As well as the Daddy who romps with him morning and evening, he has—so his mother tells him—a Father Whom he cannot see, a Father Who has given him that very Daddy, and Who loves him and takes care of him all the time.

And so, day by day, he comes to "know" more of God: and these various impressions of thought and of feeling, which for him, in his childish experience, have gathered around that one Great Name, slowly and unconsciously sift themselves out and become welded into one. A definite conception, united with a definite emotion, slowly builds itself up in the child's mind—a conception of an Unseen and Loving Father, Who, even though unseen, is yet known and loved. Big-hearted Lewis, when he was only two years old, said once, "I love Him as much as Father and Mother, because He gave them to me"; and timid Ronald, about the same age, found comfort in the thought that he was "kept care of" by Him. "He *is* a good God to keep care of me like He does," the little lad used to say.

There is similarity in the mysterious psychological processes by which all knowledge is acquired. In some such way as this, the child gained his first clear conceptions of space, of time, of the things and the people around him. Yet, in the process by which he comes to know *God*, there is—as we

have seen—a difference: for his knowledge of God, unlike his knowledge of the world around him, is permeated from the first by a mystical emotion of reverence and of love—an emotion awakened from without, and yet springing in some strange way from within.

Does it puzzle him that he cannot *see* this God Whom yet he knows and loves? Not much at first; the questioning age comes later. To the little child, the unseen is not necessarily unreal. He cannot see the force which turns the weathercock on the steeple, or sways the branches waving in the breeze. "What moves them, Mother?" he asks. And she, in answer, tells him to move his little hand to and fro like the weathercock, or wave his arm like the branches. "What makes your arm move, laddie?" she questions; and then he understands that, just as an unseen force moves his own arm, so an unseen force is moving the trees, or the weathercock. He cannot see the wind, but he sees what the wind *does*. He cannot see the love in his mother's heart; but he knows what that love makes her do for him. He cannot see the love in his own heart, but he knows that something makes him fling his arms round his mother's neck, when she comes back to him after being away; and thus there is born in him the first consciousness of the reality of the Unseen.

God, too, is unseen, but God and Love are one; and so the boy "knows" God, because he knows Love.

Every source of joy finds a loving response in the child-heart, and he comes to associate that joy with God. "Please God, make everybody happy—Mother and Father, Auntie and Cook, and the cat, and take care of them all," prayed Maurice, when he was three years old. This same little fellow, happy in the possession of a particularly loving nature, out of the goodness of his heart, unprompted, each night, used to say—"Please God, I thank you for this good gift of loving." Where the thought came from, or how he came so to express it, his mother could not say, but, slowly and unconsciously sifting out his repeated experiences, he had learnt to "know" God as the Giver of all good gifts—and, in his baby way, he revered Him and gave Him thanks.

Maybe the dawn of his religious life is brightest when the child comes to know God as naturally, as unconsciously, and as gradually, as he comes to know his mother: but, at other times, all teaching about God is postponed, sometimes deliberately, sometimes thoughtlessly, until the child is older; until he is, as we say, able to understand. How then does knowledge grow?

There is, I feel sure, no doubt but that real know-

ledge is most easily attained, whatever the age of the child—a knowledge which almost of necessity goes hand in hand with love—when the child's first thoughts of God come to him from his knowledge of his mother's own religious life; of her submission to, and reverence for, a Power greater than herself. *Merely to tell a child about God, and then to teach him a simple form of prayer, is but a poor substitute for leading him to "know" God. Second-hand knowledge can never be a sufficient basis of intercourse.* Love is the necessary foundation for prayer, if it is to be real.

Moreover, in things human and in things divine, in babyhood and in childhood, a certain time element must enter into the growth of both knowledge and of love. It is true, our religious teaching must begin with "telling"; but mere "telling" is not teaching. Some special night—it may be Christmas Eve, when the thought of the Christ-Child is more vividly in our minds; it may be the anniversary of the birth of our own little one—we can speak to our child, then old enough to understand, of the great Spirit of Love, planning for us, caring for us, watching over us, like an Unseen Father. We can show him that he owes all that he is, and all that he has, to God; and we can tell him further that, to this loving God, we are ourselves able to speak, bringing to Him our joys, confiding in Him our sorrows. It

must be to the child a strange, new thought; and only gradually can love and knowledge dawn. Can he, then, be ready, as yet, himself to pray? Is it not well that, for a while, we should pray with him? Prayer is communion with God; prayer is the "highest expression of the inner gathering up of all the powers of the soul." It therefore demands a spirit of reverence, a concentration of thought, an effort of imagination directed towards the Unseen, and a feeling of gratitude and of love, which is the outcome of knowledge. The general process of growth, in the case of the older child, must follow the lines already traced in detail, in the case of the younger. When we first "tell" him of God, we have but sown the seed of knowledge; and, for any self-expression in his religious life, we must wait until the plant has begun to grow, yielding, in its turn, the fruit of love.

CHAPTER II

HIS FIRST PRAYER

Prayer is not merely "asking for" things, it is communion with an Unseen Father—Need for preparedness for prayer—At what age should a child be ready himself to pray?—The age varies, according to the nature of the child—Unimaginative children—Unemotional children—Independent children—Nervous children—Need to avoid all "forcing"—Danger of formality in prayer—Need for self-criticism.

But until the child loves, he is not ready himself to pray. For prayer is not merely "asking for things," even though that asking be for help in his efforts to be good, and for God's blessing upon those he loves. Prayer is communion with an Unseen Father; and when the child prays, that which matters most is his *attitude* towards God, and not the *form* of his petition. In these early years, while the mother has been praying with her child, it is this rightful attitude on his part—the attitude of a trusting child to a loving Father—which she has gradually been cultivating within him, and so indirectly preparing him for prayer. Then, when she sees that he is becoming capable of unselfish love towards those around him; when she sees that he is beginning to grow

in his power of imagination; that he is beginning to know, to love, and therefore to trust his Unseen Father; she seeks for an early opportunity of awakening in him his power of self-expression. On some more than usually glad day, when she is tucking him up at night, she reminds him of all the good things in his life; recalls for him that day's special joys, the flowers and the sunshine, the romp with his father, the kisses and hugs at bedtime—till the little one thrills with conscious joy! And then she adds—"You know Who gives you all this happiness; Who makes Father and Mother love you so much, and makes you love them"—and suggests that this time, when he kneels, he should thank God himself. The child's first prayer should be an expression of gratitude. "Please God," Ronald prayed, for the first time in his own words, "thank you for making me happy. Please make everybody happy. Amen."

At what age should a child be ready to pray by himself?

If it be true that prayer is the natural outcome of knowledge and of love, then it is clear that there can be no fixed period in their lives at which children are necessarily ready. For to some, lacking in imagination, the very realisation of the Unseen Father is a matter of difficulty; and in others, unusually independent or innately selfish, the realisation of the

Father does not awaken the response of love. Others again, though knowing and loving the Father, though early conscious of their need for Him, as the result of a morbid imagination are "shy" at the thought of themselves speaking to Him. Although a capacity for religious life is, I believe, innate in all children, the period of response varies according to the fineness and depth of the child's moral nature, and the fullness of his spiritual imagination. Some are ready to pray by themselves when they are but two or three years old; others not till much later. And in the cultivation of the child's spiritual life, perhaps more than in all else—though everywhere this fact needs to be recognised—we should avoid all "forcing."

Frances, for instance, was nearly six, when she voiced what was, perhaps, her first real prayer. As a little child, she had lacked imagination. When she was four, she used to plead with her more imaginative elder brother to show her the fairies, which he could see everywhere. "*I* can't see them! Where are they? Do let me see them, Ronald! Please show them to me!" she would say. But the other children around her possessed a surplus of the imagination which she lacked, and gradually, as her nature deepened, her imagination grew. One day, when she was nearly six, a much longed-for paintbox was given to her; and in the intensity of her

childish gratitude, that night, she prayed. The flood of feeling in her little heart stimulated her growing imagination, and her prayer was real. "Please thank you, God, for putting it into my father's head to give me that paint-box, and thank the people who sold it to him, and thank the people who made it, and thank everybody." The child paused—then, softly and reverently, she added—"And thank you, dear Father, Who helped them all." Deep and deeper her mind went in spontaneous thankfulness; back to God, the great First Cause.

Kathleen, too, was nearly six when she first truly prayed. She was a sturdy little person, needing no one to "keep care of her," and not morally sensitive. The realisation of an unseen, loving Father aroused in her no instinctive response, and the thought of "God's voice within" did not appeal to her in the least! She would not, she declared, "be a copy-cat of *anything*," not even of "a still small voice"! How could it be other than a mere form for such a child as this to pray? And yet is not the habit of formal prayer likely to retard, rather than develop, any desire on the child's part for real prayer?

Norman was just such another sturdy, unemotional little person as Kathleen, but he had been taught from his earliest years to say his prayers regularly at his mother's knee. Mechanically, night after

night, year after year, he had used the same form of words, ending up with the verse of a hymn, which the child repeated like some magic incantation—"Pity mice and plicity, Teach me, Lord, to come to Thee!" Then suddenly, on his eighth birthday, he had realised that these prayers of his meant nothing to him; and in spite of the distress of his parents, in spite of all their coaxing and arguing, he refused to say them any more! A week or so after he had ceased to pray, one day when he was unusually good, his mother whispered to him: "Norman, I think you must have been asking God to help you, you have been so good to-day: haven't you, dear?" Poor anxious soul! His prompt reply only made matters worse for her: "Oh no, Mother," he said, "I've done it every bit myself." She could not understand: the child's attitude—independent, unimaginative, unemotional—was altogether foreign to her nature: and as she continued once again to urge the duty, and the necessity, of prayer, so he, once again, as strenuously resisted. For the habit of meaningless prayer had for a time robbed him of all capacity for prayer: and to children such as these, mere form is abhorrent. Mother though she was, she did not understand a nature whose lines of development were so different from her own.

At what point in such natures as these can the thought of God be brought home? How can it

become other than a mere form for such children to pray ?

One night at bedtime, when Kathleen was six, she was talking with her mother. Her religious conceptions were still hazy, the thought of God and of Jesus were confused in her little mind, and life in the spirit world was unreal to this child, full of radiant health. "Why do we pray ?" she questioned, "when God is dead ? He died a long time ago." "Darling," her mother answered, "How can God be dead, when such a little while ago He sent us Baby ?" For the moment, Kathleen was nonplussed, for she knew that babies came from God. "Well," she argued, "if He is living, He isn't as strong as the King, is He ?" "He is stronger than the King, stronger than all of us," her mother replied. "Stronger than all of us ?" the child marvelled. Then a sudden thought struck her—"Could God make that wardrobe ?" The making of the wardrobe was even more wonderful to Kathleen than the sending of the babies, for the method of that making was more within her ken. Her mother paused for a moment ; then, very quietly, she said : "The carpenter couldn't make the wardrobe, Kathleen, unless God made the trees grow, unless He gave the woodmen the power to cut them down, and the men who made the tools the power to make them, and the carpenter the power to use those tools. We

could none of us do anything unless God gave us the power." For a moment, the child was very still; then, quietly and reverently, she lifted up her hand, and slowly moving one rosy, baby finger to and fro, in a low voice she murmured, "And I could not move my little finger without God!" For a moment she lay there, gazing at her finger, invested for the first time with a wonderful significance for her. Then, turning, "I would like to say my prayers," she said. With bowed head and folded hands she knelt, and voiced what was, maybe, her first real prayer to God. "Please, God, thank you for giving me the *power* to do things; thank you for giving me the *power* to walk about; thank you for giving me the *power* to love; thank you for giving Mother the *power* to love me." Night after night, for a long while after, she asked to pray herself; and the burden of her prayer always was, "Thank you for the power"—once even remembering to thank Him for the power "to do what Mother had told her to, when Mother wasn't there to see!" The thought had sunk deeply into her child-mind. She was not conscious of the need of protection, not even of love, but she bowed in reverence before a Power she recognised as being greater than any she had known.

John, when he was a little lad of three, used to beg that neither his mother nor his nurse would say good-night to him after the light had been put out.

There was something uncanny in the thought of a voice without a visible presence to which it belonged! He had been told that God would take care of him; but, for his own part, he used to say, he preferred the big policemen, whom "God had made big on purpose," to look after him in the dark! He liked his mother or his nurse to pray by his bedside, only he dared not speak himself to this unseen God. But, by the time he was five or six, these nervous fears had vanished, and he was ready then, but not till then, himself to pray.

"Please take away God, Mother, and leave the candle instead," was Robin's plea, when told that, in the dark, God would take care of him!

"Is it true, Mother," wee Ruth asked in evident alarm one night at prayers, "Is it true that God is everywhere? Is He in this room?" The expression of her thought in words only added to her alarm: "Open the door and let Him out," she whispered eagerly to her brother.

There is no need to hurry. The consciousness and love of God can only grow gradually—our part is first to plant the seed and then to tend it carefully. For to "know" God demands effort; habit is as necessary in religion as in all else, and prayer in childhood should be regular—coming at stated times, as part of the order of the day. Only, as far as lies in our power, we must never allow it to

become a habit for the child to approach God in outward form only; his prayer—however short—must be real, the outward expression of an inward feeling.

Should we grown folk *tell* the children what to say to God? Should the words of their first prayers be suggested or taught?

We do not teach our children what words to say to their earthly father, when they slip in for a good-night kiss; why then should we teach them what to say at night to their Heavenly Father, when once they know Him? Until the child is older, his understanding deeper, his concentration greater, "taught" prayers, regularly repeated—even at first the Lord's Prayer—tend quickly to become formal; and though it may be that, in later life, even an empty form of prayer is better than no prayer at all, since it serves to keep alive a habit which, once having had some inner spiritual meaning, may at any time regain it; yet, in childhood, while the habit is still in the process of formation, we need especially to guard against mere verbal repetition.

But will the children perhaps pray unsuitably, asking for cake for supper, or for a toy yacht, receiving a shock to their faith if their prayer remains unanswered? [1]

[1] See chapter on "Children's Prayers," *The Nineteenth Century Child*, by E. H. Cooper.

The spirit, if not the actual words, of the child's first prayer will be formed after the pattern of our own. If we, in our prayers, have expressed gratitude for all that has been given rather than a desire for more; if we, in our prayers, have expressed our willingness to fall into line with God's will rather than a wish to change it in accordance with our own desires; if we ourselves have sought to live as nearly as may be as we have prayed—then the child will, in his turn, approach his Father in the attitude of one who listens rather than of one who begs. It has rested with *us* to show him the meaning of motherhood and fatherhood; it has rested with *us* to weave the thought of God's love into the very texture of his baby life. Only we need to remember that his character has been moulded far more by unconscious influences than by those of which we are conscious.

In view of this fact, are we sufficiently alive to the importance of self-criticism? We are often thoughtless in the presence of children, relating childish prayers and quaint questionings concerning God, as if they were a source of amusement. Sometimes we insist upon the saying of prayers at bedtime in much the same manner as we should insist upon the child's cleaning his teeth, and a mischievous mite is "punished," because, when bedtime comes, and the spirit of mischief is

still rampant, he refuses to kneel down quietly for his prayers! Could *we* make such a swift transition from frolic to reverence? Can *we* truly pray "the minute we are on our knees, while the echoes of our daily life are still ringing in our ears"? Many a time, we make it difficult for the child to learn that prayer is communion with an Unseen Father, by talking of "hearing him say his prayers"—as we might "hear him say his lessons"! Sometimes, too, one wonders whether, nowadays, we do not tend to spoil the child's whole conception of fatherhood by the number of "material" gifts we offer him. Though we satisfy his every whim, we may withhold the richest gifts, those which cost control on our part rather than the expenditure of money—the sympathy that can understand, the patient consideration in little things, the love that can deny. Prayer and life are more closely intertwined than we sometimes realise, for the child as well as for ourselves; and he learns more of fatherhood—both human and divine—from what we *are* than from anything we may *say*. The child's attitude towards God will be determined by his attitude towards ourselves. It is our fault if the child prays wrongly; and we must set our own prayers and our own lives aright if we desire to alter his.

CHAPTER III

HIS FIRST QUESTIONINGS

The vivid imagination of early childhood—The gradual growth of reasoning power—The difference between the children's standpoint and our own—Our need to understand the children—Points to bear in mind in the answering of their questions—The children ask: "Who made God?" "What is God's Spirit?" "Why can't I hear God?" "Why can't I see God?"—The use of fairy stories in religious teaching.

When once the child himself prays to God, he soon begins to form definite and glowing images. Then, since his imagination is keen, and his reason as yet but little developed, he projects his own feelings, his own experiences, into much which he sees around him. The whole world, for the imaginative child, is peopled with gnomes and sprites, with elves and fairies; and God is the great King of all, in His dwelling-place above the clouds. Heaven is pictured as a fair, far-distant country somewhere behind the sky, where there is always sunshine; where Jesus and the angels—perhaps with the loved ones who have gone—walk in the warm, green fields. Sometimes such children believe that the tiny, fleecy clouds they see in the

sky are the wings of those who have gone to heaven. Sometimes, from behind these clouds, angels are seen to peep. God's voice is heard in the thunder by the more timid ones, and, in the lightning, His eyes search them through.

At times, the images of childhood are wonderfully beautiful; at times, intensely practical. Laura's favourite spot on fine Sunday afternoons was a "fairy dell" in the garden, where there was a large hollow tree. The place was sacred to her, for, in the eyes of the four-year-old child, it was the "House of the Great King God." Very few knew of its existence; and to those privileged ones who were allowed to enter, she used to say, "Speak in whispers, please; we mustn't make any noise here." On a stool within the tree, she would spread a meal for the Great King, a meal of nuts and sweets, in wee dishes, ornamented with flowers and leaves. "I keep His House tidy, and sing to Him while He eats His food," she would say, softly and reverently. "He is sorry when it is wet, because I can't sing to Him then"—and then she added, in answer to a question, "My great King God is very big, with a lovely face like Mother's, with large, lovely blue eyes. He is always smiling, and loves little girls like me. He is dressed in all the colours of the flowers, and that is why I never see Him. When I get tired of playing by myself, He always

makes something attract my eyes so that I can play with that."

"God's floor is washed *every* day," said a wee mite in a "slum" school in London. "Every day," she went on wistfully, imaging her own Land of Promise, "you can have a clean handkercher, and God's House, up in Heaven, is always clean."

But the images of childhood, though fanciful, are not pure fancy, which shows no restraint; and gradually, as reason develops, the desire on the child's part to understand becomes stronger than the framing of striking imagery: and he begins to ask for the how and the why. "What is God like?" "Is He a man?" "Who made God?" "Where does He live?" "Why can't I see and hear Him as I see and hear you?"—and if, when he begins to question, we are unable to enter into his point of view, we only add to his confusion.

Jean was three years old; and a new "Nannie" had come, as she said, to "keep care of her." Shyly, yet confidingly, she had conducted her round the house, showing all her treasures indoors and out. As they passed through the large hall, her wee hand gripped her Nannie's more firmly. Pointing to a dark grating in one corner, she whispered, "Nannie, Jesus lives inside that dark hole." Her quaint childish logic was revealed for the first time

to this new Nannie, who had so quickly won her confidence. She had been told that "Jesus was ever near her," though she could not see Him; this dark grating was the only place "near her" into which she could not see; hence, behind the dark grating, *must* be Jesus!

Frances, when a little one, had been told by her parents that "in God, we live, and move, and have our being"; and then was overheard one day, when she was five years old, explaining to her younger brother that "God had a stomach *ever* so big—everything in the whole world was inside it!"

A little lad, not yet out of the infant school, declared that "you only say prayers to an old man," and added, he "was not going to do that!" —while Molly was distressed at the amount of washing "Mrs. God" would have to do, if the angels wore white robes *every* day! "Is there a Mrs. God?" the child asks often enough, or "Is God a man?"

When such remarks are made, and questions such as these are asked, it must surely mean that, somehow or other, we grown folk have failed—failed to give the child that sense of majesty and awe, which should be associated, even in the mind of the very little ones, with things divine. The fact is that we do not realise how concrete the child's point of view necessarily is, and so, in our

early teaching, we do not sufficiently anticipate difficulties of this kind. Sometimes, in our efforts to teach, we strive to implant in the child's mind abstract ideas which he is not yet capable of receiving. Sometimes, through lack of self-criticism, we all unconsciously start him with conceptions which are, in their essence, crudely material. Then his relentless logic, combined with our insufficient teaching, produces an "odd patchwork of thought," an insecure foundation on which to build the religious life of the future. We do not understand the children; and the result of our teaching is confusion and unreality, rather than any real grasp on the child's part, or any progressive expansion of his mind.

From the first, we need to impress upon him that, just as he cannot put into words, or even into actions, the love which he feels in his heart, so that, even when he hugs us "tightest," he knows that he feels more than he can ever express; so is God greater than all our names for Him, and our little words, at their best, can only express a tiny bit of Him. He is *like* a father, *like* a mother, *like* a strong and loving friend—yet infinitely more than all.

Would the child ask—"Is there a Mrs. God?" or "Is God a man?" or even "Who made God?"—if that were done? Though abstract truths, which, for us, have a clear and definite meaning, are, for him,

meaningless, making it difficult for grown folk to answer his questions, yet the mind of the little child is spiritually so responsive to Love, that, on that power of response, we are able to fall back. On the threshold of life, with wondering eyes and sensitive soul, he stands, capable of teaching us, through his freshness and simplicity, more than we can ever teach him; and, if certain of the great spiritual truths embodied in life seem clear to us, it should not be hard—by parable and by story, by the occasional religious interpretation of his own experience—humbly to strive to make them clear to him. But this needs to be done simply and spontaneously, as the outcome of our own unconscious actions, rather than with any deliberate desire on our part to impress the child. It is those stories which seem to fall in his way by chance, those interpretations of his own experience which are not meant to be didactic, from which he is most ready to learn; and, as I have already said, it is what we *are* that matters more than what we *say*. For, just as the meaning of a sentence out of a book is determined by its context, so our answers to the children's questions will be interpreted by them, though all unconsciously to us, in accordance with the way in which they harmonise with the context of our lives.

Granted, then, that we are striving so to live that we may also dare to teach, how can we seek in-

directly to answer the questions of the tiny child; and so help him, in and through his life's experiences, to find, for himself, a God Whom he can love and trust—and, at the same time, as far as in him lies, can understand?

Judith, just five years old, was not yet out of the infant school. It was the end of the Scripture lesson, and her little face wore a puzzled look: then—"If God made everything, who could have made God, Teacher?" she asked. Her teacher tried to explain, but the child's special question was still unanswered—for even if God were there first so as to make "the world," how had He himself ever come to be? "My mother can't tell me, and now, when I've asked you, you can't," she said resignedly, with a wistful look in her eyes.

Can we not "tell"? Can we not lead the child, by a progressive analysis of her own concrete experience, gradually to discover for herself the difference between that which ALWAYS IS and those things which, as we are accustomed to use the word, are "made" or changed, under our own eyes or within our comprehension—and will she not then begin to understand?

"What sort of things can you make yourself, Judith?" we can ask; and, when we have heard of the doll's clothes, and the paper mats, and the

little Christmas gifts prepared so recently with pride and joy, we can lead her on to tell of the wonderful "things" which other people make—mother in the home, father in the workshop, the people in the factories. And then, once more, we can ask: "But *how* are all these things made? Mother makes your dresses, but must not she first have cloth? And the cloth comes from the warehouse, and the warehouses get it in huge bales from the woollen factory, and the wool is got from the sheep—and *men cannot 'make'* sheep." In this way, first taking one instance and then another, step by step we are able to lead the child to see for herself that it is always the same: that when we—men, women, and little children—say that we have "made" anything, all we have really done is to "change" something else. We hew down living trees and saw the wood into planks, and these are "changed" into boxes and forms, into doors and window frames. We tend and shear living sheep, and the wool is "changed" into cloth, and the cloth into clothes to wear and curtains to keep out the cold in winter. Clearer and clearer gradually grows the thought in the child's mind that every process of "making" into which we can enter, when traced back to its beginning, brings us face to face with something in Nature which we *cannot* make—face to face with life and growth.

And then, once more, we can lead her back in thought to her own home, where each one is busily "making" things for other people. *Why* does Judith make presents for her friends and clothes for her doll? *Why* does Mother make Judith's clothes and why is Father always "making" in the workshop? Is it not because of the love in all their hearts? And can we "make" this love? Or is that, too, something "given," just as all life is given?

The child knows: and, out of her own experience, she will have found a concrete answer to her own question. Life and love can never be "made"; they just ARE. God is the Source of all Life; God is the Central Spirit of Love from Whom comes all our own power of loving: therefore He just IS, He was not "made."

"What is God's Spirit, Mother?" questioned Neville, one day when he was about five years old.

He was a little lad prone to asking questions on "big" subjects on all sorts of unlikely occasions, and he was in the middle of his bath when the thought suddenly occurred to him. He was told that it was God's Spirit inside us that made us do good and loving acts, think good and loving thoughts. "It is God's Spirit inside you," his mother went on, "that makes you act unselfishly when it is hard, that makes you tell the truth when

you have done wrong: God's Spirit grows stronger in you, and you grow more like God, every time you do the right." The answer was just the natural outcome of his mother's own view of life, it was true to the child's experience, and it was concrete: so that Neville understood. "I see," he answered, and was quiet awhile.

Now it happened that just before his bath, in some small matter, he had been persistently selfish, resisting all efforts made to get him to do an unselfish deed; and the matter had, for the time being, been put aside. There was no connection in the mother's mind between her words and what had occurred in the nursery a short time before, but the child himself suddenly remembered. "Yes, I see," he repeated thoughtfully: then, very slowly, he added: "I want God's Spirit to grow strong in me. Marjorie may have that toy of mine I would not let her play with."

Lewis had been sitting quietly all alone, for a long time, in a corner of the study. Suddenly he spoke, and there was a pathetic quiver in his little voice. "Father, I don't understand. Why can't I hear God when He speaks, just as I hear you? Samuel did; it says so in the Bible; but I've tried for ever so long, and I can't hear anything." Wondering how best to reply, and longing to help,

the father looked searchingly and lovingly at the boy—and, swiftly, the little lad ran across the room and nestled down in his father's lap. And then, in a flash, the father himself knew the true answer to his boy's question. "Why did you come to me, laddie? I never called you," he said, and Lewis crept closer. "I knew you wanted me, Father, I just *knew*." And then his father told him that, just as he knew his earthly father's thoughts without needing to hear his voice, so—when we love Him—we know our Heavenly Father's thoughts, and in our hearts we hear His call; there is no need for words. The child's question was answered by a concrete happening in his father's experience and his own; and, child though he was, he understood.

Maurice was only seven when he said: "We ask God about things when we pray, but we don't have to ask Him by speaking exactly—we ask Him in our hearts, and He tells us by a voice inside us, in our hearts. We can hear Him when we listen, and all the time He is speaking."

Why he cannot "see" God is often to the growing child a very real difficulty. Before he begins to pray for himself, the thought of the Unseen does not often puzzle him. He knows that there is much, the reality of which he does not doubt,

which is yet invisible—the heat of the fire; the strength of the wind; the love in his heart for us and in our hearts for him—only he is not called upon to *speak* to these unseen things. It is to us, the seen, he speaks; not to the unseen love within us. And now that we have suggested that he should speak to this unseen God, he begins to wonder, and to ask why His face should be hidden from him.

Can we, by an appeal to the child's imagination, bring home to him the thought that it is possible for him to hold communion with an invisible spirit world?

Once upon a time there was a deep, deep forest, where the trees were so tall that they looked as if they could touch the clouds. In the day, it was dark there; but in the evenings, when the sun went down, it made a red glow all around, and everything looked quite different. Then, if you listened very hard, you might hear the tread of the fairies' feet and the rustle of their wings.

In the middle of this forest there was a small cottage, built of pine logs; and in the cottage there lived a wood-cutter with his wife and one little boy. Though he never had any other little boys or girls to play with, Malcolm was very happy. He played in the forest all day long; and when he was

tired of playing with the rabbits and the squirrels, he would sit down very quietly and listen to the stories that the wind whispered through the tree-tops. Sometimes they were wild and rough, sometimes sad, sometimes amusing, always beautiful. But the stories he liked best were the fairy stories: stories of how the fairies helped the forest folk, and of how they left their revels to bring aid to those in distress.

But one day Malcolm's father said to him: "Now that you are growing older, you must do your part to help us. Every evening you must go into the forest and gather sticks for your mother." "Yes, Father," answered Malcolm, for he was an obedient little boy; but all the same, he felt sad. For the evening was the time when he always listened to the stories of the wind in the trees.

But, that evening, he set off to gather up the sticks. It was hard work, and Malcolm could not help wishing that he could sit still and listen as usual. Slower and slower became the stick gathering, until, at last, Malcolm threw down the bundle and sat down on the grass beside it. But, as he did this, he noticed that the sun was just setting; and the red glow seemed to cast a magic light all around. Malcolm thought of the fairies and began to feel ashamed. "Would they like it?" he thought. "Would they like to see me lazy and sulky? No indeed!" and

he began once more to gather up his sticks. And then a strange thing happened! The sticks did not seem half so heavy, and he himself felt happy and contented. What did it all mean?

"Those who go about their work willingly and happily are helped by the fairies"—that was what the wind had whispered to him more than once.

Yes, that was it! The fairies were helping *him!* Malcolm could see them nowhere; but he did not need to see, for he *knew* that they were near! And as he went along, with his bundle of sticks, he began to sing, for there seemed no longer to be any weight in them! And when he reached home, the cottage somehow looked extra bright in the firelight, and he enjoyed his supper as never before! *The fairies had been keeping him company!* And that night, as he dreamt of his tiny unseen helpers, he thought that they seemed glad in his own gladness.

With the unconscious insight of childhood, had not the little lad, though all unwittingly, touched upon a truth greater than he knew?

That which he had *really* felt was the wonderful mystery of the teeming forest life; that which was revealed to him was God's presence there. He had clothed this wondrous moral experience in the garb of fairy lore; but he had, in reality, discovered

that "God's Spirit grew in him, and he grew more like God" each time he did the right!

Malcolm did not need actually to look upon the fairies with his naked eye, in order to see them. Then, cannot the children understand that, to see God, we do not need to *look upon* a Person? "Seeing God" is an intense and thrilling consciousness that where Love is, where Beauty is, where Goodness is—there is God. "Thou canst not see My Face, but I will make My goodness pass before thee," was the answer long ago given to Moses: and to this truth—that, behind all the visible manifestations of life, there is a great Invisible, Loving, Unseen Power—the children instinctively respond. Granted that they have "caught" from us, as it were, the spirit of love and reverence, some such story will suggest to them an answer which is at once satisfying and true, unless we have, all unknowingly, confused them by our mistaken efforts at direct explanation.

Is there risk in thus using fairy stories to draw the child nearer to the thought of God? Not, I believe, if we ourselves are conscious, as we tell them, of the deep, underlying truth of fairy lore. In early childhood, the abstract must needs be clothed in the concrete; and gradually, if we do not misinterpret, if we have told such stories in the right way, the children will cast off the husk, re-

taining the kernel—and still will understand. The romance of fairies, gnomes, and sprites is full of spiritual truth. Everything around us has a spirit of its own, is fraught with mystery. Natural objects are thoughts of the Creative Power, clothed in matter. Can the Spirit of Love, of Beauty, of Power, embodied in the world, be more fitly expressed for the child than in this undergrowth of tiny, helpful creatures, haunting fields and woods —creatures real enough, although to human eyes invisible ?

CHAPTER IV

GROWING KNOWLEDGE

God "known" as Creator, by watching and sharing in the processes of creation—God "known" as the source of all goodness, in the effort to be good—The Divine Impulse within—Development through self-activity—Our religious teaching tested by the child in his daily experiences.

THE consciousness and love of God can, as I have already said, only grow gradually; our part is to plant the seed, and then to tend it carefully. By prayer and by teaching—as naturally, as gently, and as gradually as possible—we have sought to lay the foundation of the child's first knowledge, of his first conscious communion with an Unseen Father, a knowledge and a communion which early lead him to visualise for himself, in concrete and glowing imagery, the truths which we have sought to tell. Then later, as his reason develops, his own vivid images lead him to question, and we, in our answers, as we have seen, seek, not so much to give him definite knowledge, as to impart to him somewhat of the sense of mystery bound up with the love, the infinitude, the eternity of God. God, for us, is the great Spirit of Love from Whom all the love

of fathers and of mothers comes; God, for us, is Infinite All-Being, incomprehensible, yet not unknowable; God, for us, is the Father and Mother-Soul of the universe. Christ taught us to pray to "Our Father which art in Heaven"—teaching us to call Him by a name at once intimate in its association, yet infinite in its conception. All our names for Him can be, at best, but symbols of a great Reality beyond all naming; imperfect instruments by which we seek to understand and to measure the Infinite. "The concept of God is never by definition, but by analogy and symbol." "Thus saith the Lord . . . As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you"; and we can tell him that God is *like* a father, *like* a mother, *like* a tender friend—although infinitely transcending them all.

Through that intangible something which we call sympathy, helping the child to enter into the spirit of what we say, he is able dimly to comprehend even such truths as these, if only we ourselves have comprehension. For God is Love: and gradually, as the child questions and thinks and prays, and, all unconsciously, gathers in experiences which, in his baby way, he strives to use—through love, day by day, he comes to know Him better.

It is with this growing knowledge of God, a knowledge which now the child is gaining for himself as

the result of his own observations, that in this chapter I want to deal.

In an elementary school in the heart of a slum district, where the thought of God as a Father is almost repellant to the children, for to them fatherhood means the exercise of brutal power, they are ready enough to reverence and to love the "God who hath made the daisies." In one such school, two hyacinths were growing in glasses in the window —one was already breaking out into blossom, while the other, "the lazy bulb," as the children called it, only showed, as yet, its firm green leaves. Lesson time was over, and the poorly-clad children had crowded round the window, eager to show their cherished possessions to a familiar visitor. As they drew near, their little faces unconsciously grew reverent, and their voices were hushed. "Look, lady, isn't it beautiful?" one little chap said solemnly, as he gently touched the leaves. "God did it, lady," another whispered; while still another, looking with wondering eyes at the "lazy bulb," softly murmured, "The fairies haven't whispered to that there one yet!"

Driving through the wooded lanes of Devonshire, Robin sat very still, nestling close against his mother. Everywhere beauty was revealed, and the boy—though only five—was awed by it. Every now and

then, his little heart full to overflowing, he whispered softly to himself—"Oh, isn't God good? Isn't He good?"

"Thank you for being so clever as to make beautiful little babies and all things like that," prayed Godfrey, revealing the same sense of wonderment.

"Thank you for all the good things you send me, like the water," Brian prayed one night. "Water doesn't seem much, but if you had come a long, long way across a desert, and you were very, very tired and thirsty, you would give ten shillings—no, almost all you had—for a drink of water; and You sent the water!"

"I seem to have learned most of God from the things of Nature," Margaret writes, looking back upon her childhood. "I was always content, when I was little, to be out in our beautiful, large garden, and in the little wood behind, carpeted, in the Spring, with primroses and bluebells. I can see now that, somehow, I felt a Higher Influence working in all the lovely things of Nature, and that my childhood's God was a Presence amid all the wonders of the flowers and trees."

For the most part, amid happy surroundings, such as I am picturing for the child in this slight sketch of the development of his religious life—surroundings such as we would have, if only it were in our power, for all children—it is the beautiful things in

life which, at first, attract his attention ; the mystery of sin and suffering may trouble him soon enough, but not yet. For what does it mean to be a child ? "It is," writes Francis Thompson, "to be something very different from the man of to-day. It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism. It is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe in belief ; it is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ears ; it is to turn pumpkins into coaches, mice into horses, lowness into loftiness, and nothing into everything, for each child has his fairy godmother in his own soul."

"The Eternal Child, as he moves through this universe, shouts with surprise at everything he sees in the presence of the mystery of life." So-called common things are not common for him ; all is penetrated with mystery ; the infinite lies behind and within the finite—and as, with wondering eyes, he turns the pages of "Nature's illuminated textbook of field and forest, sea and sky," God stands ever more fully revealed, for the Beyond draws nearer to us when we wonder. "Wonder at the things before you" are words said to have been spoken by Christ.[1] Perhaps if we grown folk only wondered more, we might understand the children

[1] *Unwritten Sayings of our Lord*, by Rev. David Smith, M.A., D.D.

better. Perhaps with the "Renaissance of Wonder" might come a Renaissance of Religion.

But this knowledge of God, which some children receive unaided, as they watch the free life of Nature, is, for all, deepened and intensified, when they come into closer contact with natural phenomena through their own occupations, for it is what the child has tried to do for himself that he best understands and appreciates, when done by others.

Donald once asked his mother to tell him what she thought was the most beautiful thing in the whole world. After thinking a minute, she replied, "The birth of a little baby." "Oh, I don't," he said. "I think that the way they make gas, and bring it along pipes into everybody's houses, and the way it gives us light in the night, is far more wonderful! Sometimes, when I am getting off to sleep at night, I think about it and try to imagine how they do it." Donald had been told something of the miracle of birth, but he had never had any pets of his own to care for; he had never come into touch, as it were, at first hand with its mystery. Man's work, in this case, struck the child as more wonderful than God's work, because, by trying to do similar things himself, he had some inkling of their difficulty.

All her childhood, whenever she was not at school, Nellie had helped her mother to make artificial

flowers ; and the strain of incessant work and grinding poverty had told upon the child's health. So kind folk planned a holiday for her ; and the day came when the child found herself, for the first time, amid all the beauty of a country garden. Up and down the garden paths she wandered, saying nothing, only gazing intently at the gaily-coloured flowers and at the close, green border of box. Then, in a soft whisper, she asked if she might " just touch the flowers " ; and in ever-deepening wonderment, softly she passed her frail fingers over flower after flower, round leaf after leaf. " I was thinking," she said presently, when they asked what was in her mind, " I was thinking what good work God puts into the flowers " ; and then, with a wistful longing in her voice, she added, " *we* couldn't afford to do it for the money *we* get."

The child learns to know God as Creator when he has taken a part, however small and insignificant, in the process of creation. Teaching in childhood, if only words are employed, is as good as thrown away. What the child experiences, he knows.

Ruth and Mary, about five years old, shared between them a flower-bed, and in this bed they, like the other children in the school, had sown a few peas and beans.[1] Every day they would grub up the

[1] This story, told already in *The Dawn of Character*, is given by Baroness von Bülow in her book, *Child and Child Nature*.

earth with their little hands, to see why the seeds did not come up, much as Budge and Toddy, having buried the dead bird, dug up the earth to find out when the bird went to heaven. In the other children's beds, little green seedlings were beginning to peep above the ground, and these two inquisitive little ones looked sadly at them, and then at their own beds, where nothing was yet showing. It was explained to them that if they wanted their own seeds to grow, they must be patient and leave them alone for a while. So every day they visited their garden, and, with great self-control, refrained from touching the soil—and at last, one morning, they were found kneeling by the bed, in a perfect transport of wonder and delight at the tiny green blades which were just peeping above the ground!

They had seen plants growing often enough, but they had not paid much attention, because they themselves had not taken any part in sowing and caring for the seedlings. But now, for the first time, they were consciously face to face with this wonder of nature. Yesterday, there was nothing to be seen; to-day, little green leaves were peeping through the soil! "Was it you, children," the teacher asked, "who made them grow?" "No," said Mary, "God did it"; and then the teacher told them how God made the sunshine, so as to warm the earth; then sent the dew and rain, so as to soften

the ground ; and so helped the seeds to grow. Little Ruth and Mary were keenly interested ; and later in the day, when the children were matting, out of the fullness of her heart, Ruth asked if she could give her bit of finished work to God !

" For the development of religion, the teaching of visible phenomena must come before the teaching of words ; the Creator must first reveal Himself in His visible works, before He can be apprehended as the Invisible God of our spirits." We are consciously reverent when we know ourselves to be co-workers with God. It is said of the great Huguenot surgeon, Ambrose Paré, that he had inscribed, over the entrance of the operating room, these words : " Man dressed the wound, God healed it."

Only, as it were, by " sharing " in the process of creation does the child come to know God as Creator ; only in so far as he himself tries to *be* good, does he come to know God as the source of all goodness. For we can only be said truly to know that which we have ourselves, in some measure, experienced.

With an ugly look on his face, for the day was close, and the carrying of a mackintosh was a burden felt by the little lad to be intolerable, Jack dragged wearily along. Suddenly he noticed that his mother was carrying another mackintosh, and,

moved by an impulse to help, he insisted upon carrying hers as well. As if by magic, his ugly look departed, and the weight of the cloak was lightened! Glad at heart, the child finally burdened himself with the cloaks and mackintoshes of the whole party, and joyfully trudged along! He had made a discovery concerning the nature of Love—he had found that happiness lay in loving self-surrender, whatever the conditions of the weather, or the nature of the task imposed!

Molly was almost always "grumpy," because, almost always, she was thinking of herself. She *wanted* to be happy, but how was the change to be brought about? What Molly needed to learn, in order to get happiness, was to think of other people instead of herself, to set her mind on *giving* rather than *getting*. Following her mother's directions, laboriously she cut, out of a sheet of brown paper, four big letters, S, E, L, and F; and these she again cut up, each into four pieces. Then, on a sheet of white paper, lightly she fixed the pieces together, till the word SELF stood out large and clear for her to see. It was now suggested to her that, each day in the holidays during which she managed to keep this object sufficiently in view, she was to be allowed, at bedtime, to tear off one piece of that big word. It was made up of sixteen separate pieces; there were twenty-one days of holiday; to

clear that white sheet in the three weeks' time was to be Molly's object. Holidays were naturally especially trying to this selfish wee lassie ; but there was a certain element of fun in the little plan, and she strove hard to "play the game." And while she was consciously bent on thinking of others, she was learning unconsciously to forget herself ; so that, while the *word* was coming slowly off the sheet, the *difficulty*, for which it stood, was disappearing out of her life. The "game" was only a bit of life's experience put in a concrete form which a little child might see and understand ; so that she too might make the discovery, which Jack had already made for himself, that happiness is to be found only in the self-surrender of right doing, only in love.

When Neville, wanting "God's Spirit to grow strong in him," let Marjorie play with the coveted toy, it was the same truth which was brought home to him.

The children were learning for themselves the inner meaning of love—Where Love is, God is ; and, in loving, they knew more of God.

John gradually learnt to control his temper ; Nancy, to tell the truth ; Robin, to concentrate his attention, and put his best efforts into the bit of work he was doing ; Frances, to give up her own will when she knew it to be right—and

in the effort to *be* good, the children were coming to *know* more of goodness, and, therefore, more of God.

Yet, oftentimes, it was a very big effort. Jack had had many struggles with himself before the impulse to carry the mackintoshes unasked was able to seize him so quickly. Molly, many a time in those memorable holidays, had a hard fight before she could give up her selfish desires in the effort to consider other people. The child's nature is a complex of good and evil; he is a bundle of tendencies; a mass of potentialities, desirable and undesirable; and only gradually is his better side strengthened, his weakness overcome. But is it not by means of this gradual transition, by means of the effort which he is called upon to put forth as he tries to be good, that he gains an ever deeper knowledge of God?

Within the stem of the water lily[1] is an elastic spiral coil, so adjusted as to give the lily power to rise or sink, as the water in which it grows deepens or diminishes. In this way it is able always to rest upon the very surface of the water, face to face with the life-giving sun. And within each one of us there is a Divine Impulse upwards, giving us the power to rise above the pressure of circumstances

[1] *Cf.* Sermon by Archdeacon Wilberforce, entitled "Don't Worry."

and temptations, and to expand in the sunshine of God's liberty: only, that which in the water lily is *automatic*, needs to become *conscious* in us. Before the power to rise becomes our own, we are called upon consciously to place our "will," as it were, alongside of this Divine Impulse within us: that is, we are called upon to be co-workers with God. This truth even the little child is ready to appreciate and to understand.

"When you ask God to help you to do anything," Norman said, when he was only five, "you have to try your very hardest yourself, then He does the last little bit you can't manage. If He did it all, it would be spoilings!"

And Robin, when he was nearly nine, in one of those moments of self-revelation, which are not so rare in childhood as they become later, expressed the very same thought. "I feel," he said once, "as if God was like a nurse or a mother. If you ask Him to make you good, you don't have to just ask and forget all about it, and leave it to Him. You have to try your hardest—just as you have to try to do any hard job for yourself, and your nurse or your mother helps you to finish."

The child knows, from his personal experience, that goodness would no longer be goodness, if he could just be made good from outside. "It would be just pretend goodness, Daddie, wouldn't it?" said

a wee laddie, "like Rover, who pretends to go to sleep when I tell him."

By *sharing* in God's works, by working, as it were, hand in hand with Him, the child realises afresh the power and goodness of the Spirit at the back of the universe: his spiritual nature, equally with his intellectual and moral nature, develops only by self-activity.

We have seen how, in his efforts to be good, the child comes increasingly to know God as the source of all goodness—but his experience in the world within him will, at times, be strangely at variance with his experience in the world without, unless we grown folk are striving to live out in our lives the religious truths we have been teaching him with our lips.[1]

We have told him that God is *like* a father, *like* a mother; we have told him of One Who always understands, Who is always merciful; we have told him of a Divine Love overruling all, working in and through all of us; and now the time has

[1] "It is only through our mysterious human relationships," writes the author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, "through the love, and tenderness, and purity of mothers, and sisters, and wives, through the strength, and courage, and wisdom of fathers, and mothers, and teachers, that we can come to the knowledge of Him, in Whom alone the love, and the tenderness, and the purity, and the strength, and the courage, and the wisdom of all these dwell for ever in perfect fullness."

come when he begins, though maybe all unconsciously, to compare our teaching with the results of his daily experience. If *we* arbitrarily command and arbitrarily punish; if *we* fail to meet true repentance half-way, to be patient with the tiny sinner; if *we*, somehow or other, fail to understand—must not the result be that the certainty of his childish faith in God's goodness is undermined? To "tell" him of a God Whom, in the little details of our daily life with him, we so often, all unwittingly, deny, is but to court failure in our teaching. We "order" him to do things in a tone which would suggest the despot, rather than the wise and loving ruler. We punish hastily, in a spirit of vexation; we jump to conclusions with regard to the probable motives of his actions; we even sometimes say that "mothers can't love naughty little children, but only good ones!" The fact is that we grown folk have so got into the habit of accepting our position of authority over the little ones, that, oftentimes, we tend to lose sight of the responsibility that it entails upon us—and thus many things in the daily routine of the child's life seem to us unimportant, which, to him, viewed from his different standpoint, are of the utmost importance. Day by day our words and actions take their place in the content of his life, side by side with our teaching, side by side with his own inner experience—slowly building

up or pulling down the foundation of his religious life. If, as he grows older and makes his own observations, the consciousness and love of God is to grow and to deepen in him as it should, then we must see to it, as far as lies in our power, that right wins, and not might, in the child's life history, in nursery, home, and school.

CHAPTER V

LEARNING TO SERVE

Growth of the child's knowledge of right and wrong—Growth of right desire and birth of moral ideals—The place of discipline—Outward compulsion and inner vision—Realisation of the power of God within—The influence of love in the child's life—From love springs a desire to obey—Love of God and obedience to God—Love must manifest itself in service.

But to be a co-worker with God in matters of conduct—and this is what we must desire for our children—implies, not only a *knowledge* of the right on the part of the child, but also a genuine *desire* on his part to do the right. Yet, to begin with, as a tiny child, he was conscious neither of right nor of wrong; his actions were determined solely by the impulse of the moment, whether desirable or undesirable. How, then, does it come about that all this can be changed? that he can learn, not only to know right from wrong, but to cleave to the one and to despise the other?

Gerald was his mother's first-born. He was born in January. In February, the nurse left him in the charge of his mother. Within a month he was

the sole ruler in the household. Unless he chanced to doze, his mother was barely permitted to dress in the morning. He regulated the time of household meals throughout the day. When evening came, and he was laid in his cradle for sleep, all sound had to cease, and the voices of chance visitors were hushed, ere they stepped into the house. Even at night, his devoted mother dared not sleep, until he gave her permission.

With each month of his life, his government became increasingly despotic. He refused to be left alone in the nursery, even for a moment. As he sat in his high chair, playing with his toys, he would persistently throw them on the floor, solely for the pleasure of making someone pick them up. He refused to settle for sleep, unless soothed by a lullaby, or gently patted. His every whim must be satisfied, and satisfied at once, or his childish wrath was keen. When he was old enough to walk out of doors, he would step in every puddle, climb every doorstep, slip behind every gate. Gradually, his mother grew more patient, quietly putting up with his capricious behaviour. Gradually, he grew more impatient of the slightest restraint.

By the time he was two years old, his rule had become so despotic that even his mother felt that it would be best, at any rate for a time, to hand him over to the care of a nurse—a nurse who

would know better than she did how to deal with him.

For two years Gerald had been a capricious, despotic ruler : during that time the words " right " and " wrong " had acquired no meaning for him : he had been conscious only of intense, momentary desires. Yet, in another two or three years, he became, to all intents and purposes, a law-abiding citizen. How was the change wrought ?

When Nurse first took the reins into her hands, Gerald's nursery was not by any means a happy place. All went comparatively smoothly so long as no one interfered with him. But he would not brook the slightest restraint, nor put up with a moment's delay, in the satisfaction of his capricious desires. Consequently, there were troubles over dressing, troubles over breakfast, troubles the whole day through.

One morning, seated on his engine, he was " puffing " eagerly around the nursery. Nurse was ready to take him for a walk ; she knew he would not want to stop his game. As if she expected him to respond, however, and to be ready to welcome the fun waiting for him outside, she called out brightly : " Now then, Mr. Engine-Driver, real trains are better than toy ones any day ! Come and get on your things, and we'll go and watch them. Through the tunnel they come, puff, puff, puff, and what a

scream they make! Do you remember?" Nurse chats brightly, while she gets out his coat; and a struggle is going on in his mind. He doesn't want to stop his game, yet Nurse makes him feel the fascination of those real trains so keenly that his toy engine dwindles into insignificance as he thinks of them. Real smoke and real engine-drivers and a real tunnel! Nurse already knew Gerald's likes and dislikes better than he did himself; she knew what was likely to tempt him.

Without the usual struggle, this time he yields. The toy engine is left in the corner, and Gerald, eager now to be off out, runs to Nurse to be dressed.

This thought of the train, held out as a bait to the boy, was more than an expedient on Nurse's part, for temporarily avoiding a struggle. He had got into the bad habit of constantly opposing his self-will to the other wills around him; it was part of her method to establish a correspondence between his will and hers, and so to train him in right doing, though at first all unconsciously, along the lines of his own thought.

To such a strong-willed boy, deliberate and conscious self-control over his desires was bound to come hardly. Through her happy suggestions, winning him over to the *habit* of wanting what was desirable, and not wanting what she knew to be un-

desirable, such conscious control would, she believed, come more easily.

Nurse knew—as we all know—how hard it is for a small child of two to give up pleasure for duty, how much self-control this demands. Until he had learnt control—and she knew that there would be plenty of opportunities for so doing in the little experiences of every day—as far as lay in her power, she made his duties also his delights.

It was evening; and Gerald was busy building great high towers with his bricks, just for the fun of knocking them down! His bath was ready; need there be the usual struggle over leaving his game and going to bed? "Your boat is in the bath, Sonny," breaks in Nurse; "come and drop the sponge in and make a big wave, and see if it will tumble over!"

The thought of his boat is fascinating; but so are the bricks. Besides, he doesn't want to go to bed! Yet he is growing fond of Nurse, and is a bit sorry afterwards, when he behaves badly to her. The battle of desires is already getting more complicated, and, like an under-current in his child consciousness, there is a growing feeling that, what Nurse wants, always has to be done in the end. His consciousness of Nurse's power combines half-unconsciously with the exciting thought of his boat, tossing on the waves of the bath; and, together,

these elements in his mind prove stronger than his pleasure in the bricks.

One more link has been forged in the chain of this habit of co-operation in right doing. But the chain has many links, and all will not be forged so easily as this.

A few weeks after, with a look of defiance on his face, Gerald stands on the brink of a puddle. Puddles, he knows, are among the group of what he might perhaps call the "No-no" things. He knows he ought not to step in, but the temptation of the splashing water is strong. Nurse looks at him, and holds out her hand. "That's such a wee puddle, you can *jump* that! Only doggies, with no shoes or stockings, *walk* in the puddles. Little boys jump! —come, jump!"

Again that inward struggle between his own desire and Nurse's suggestion; and, every day, his desires are growing stronger and harder to control.

"Sometimes," said a child philosopher, "your Wish sticks so close to you, you cannot use your Will"—which is what happened now to this boy.

Revelling in his disobedience, splash he went into the puddle. His joy was short-lived! Silently and promptly, he was put back into the mail-cart. Silently and promptly, he was wheeled home. Once indoors, without a word, those damp, uncomfortable shoes and stockings were taken off, and cosy,

dry ones took their place. But he knew Nurse was not pleased with him, he knew that he could not, now, watch the trains, and, for the rest of the day, he was not trusted to walk. He did not feel quite easy over his behaviour, for he knew, in his little mind, that Nurse was only wanting him to do what was right, when she kept him from stepping in puddles. He had satisfied his momentary desires, he had suffered—and he was beginning to *understand.*

Nurse rarely explained to him *why* what he did was wrong, at the time of the wrongdoing, nor, when she asked him to do anything, did she always tell him *why* she wanted it done. They had little quiet talks at odd, unexpected moments; and, somehow, he came, all unconsciously, increasingly to understand what the reasons were, and that Nurse always had them. Bit by bit, as the result of experience, certain generalisations formed themselves in his mind. "Wet feet give little boys colds;" "toys, left about carelessly, get broken;" "frowns make other people unhappy, as well as yourself," and so on. Bit by bit, he began to realise that he *liked* to be "trusted," that he was happier when he was obedient; and though many were the battles that had yet to be fought—and all were not victories—before he became the sensible, good, little lad Nurse wanted him to be, after each battle *he understood more.*

After that eventful day on which he had stepped defiantly into the puddle, he managed to avoid puddles for a good while. But most lessons in childhood, whether in arithmetic or in conduct, have to be gone over more than once; and a few weeks after, there had been such a downpour in the night that the pools were particularly tempting. He was reminded by Nurse that puddles were forbidden; but somehow, that morning, his desire for the water pulled very hard. Only half yielding, he walked as close as ever he could to puddle after puddle, and was just going to step right into the middle of one of them, when Nurse checked him. "Gerald, you know that you must not go into the water," Nurse said firmly. "I could easily pick you up and put you back into the mail cart, and so keep you out of those puddles; but I want you to be a man, and *keep out of them yourself*. Don't go near one more puddle, or you will have to ride." But, once again, his "Wish" was stronger than his "Will"; and he forfeited his freedom. The experience, however, taught him more than that it was "naughty" to step into puddles. What Nurse wanted, in this instance, as in so many others, was that he should *use his own will* to do what he knew to be right; and this he understood.

A few days later, after his afternoon walk, he begged to be allowed to stay awhile in the garden,

instead of going straight up into the nursery. Nurse looked at her watch. "There isn't time to-day, dear," she said; "we'll come in earlier to-morrow, and then we can manage it;" and she turned to go upstairs, leaving him to follow. Should he follow, or should he disobey and stay? His desires are keen; his will is strong. Nurse never looked behind; she *trusted* him to understand and come after her. And the best part of him did understand. Slowly and reluctantly, he followed Nurse upstairs. "Wasn't it hard to come in?" she said, when he reached the nursery; "but then a boy of four years old can do hard things, when he tries!" And he was glad that he had come.

One extra busy morning, he asked if there was anything in which he could help, and Nurse suggested that he should put the little toy cupboard in order, while she was busy in the bathroom. He looked at the cupboard, then, wistfully, at Nurse; and, slowly and hesitatingly, he said: "If you really *want* me to, I'll do the cupboard; but I'd much rather be beside you." Work, done beside the nurse he so much loved, was not felt by him as work; and he did not yet know the joy of service, for its own sake. So, for a while, for the most part, he did his tiny share of household duties *with* Nurse rather than *for* her. He helped her to prepare the baby's bath, handed her the wee, warm garments, one by

one, helped her to straighten the room, and even to dust the nursery. All the while, they chatted and sang, he asked her questions, or she told him stories; and the work seemed done in no time. *She* enjoyed it, consequently *he* enjoyed it; they were "merry workers together in this merry, charming world." Yet, without knowing it, all the while he was getting to *like* helping people, to *prefer* to see the room tidy. The desire for order and for helpfulness, for their own sake, was growing; and this would make the increasing demands, which would be put upon him as he grew older, no longer felt as drudgery.

Just about this time, his little cousin Peggy came to stay with him. The children were playing in the nursery, and Peggy had grown tired of her game. "Do play with me a bit, Gerald," she begged; but Gerald was still keenly interested in what he was doing, and did not want to stop. "Come here, dearie," said Nurse. "I can put my work aside for a bit and play with you." Gerald heard; he knew that Nurse was busy. He had a bit of the feeling that he ought to have played with Peggy for a while, when she first asked him, and when he heard his nurse offer to play with her, it made him wish that he had offered first. "No, Nurse, don't you stop, I'll play with her," he said; and, glad in her approval, *glad in himself for having done the right*, he threw himself heartily into Peggy's game. The power to

deny herself, which he saw in his dear nurse, made him realise the same power within himself. Nothing is more readily caught than the spirit of right-doing, when the right is done gladly.

Bit by bit, then, Gerald was beginning to *want* to do the right, even apart from pleasing Nurse. Now, when he failed to do what she wished, he felt that he had not merely disobeyed; but that he had failed in some larger way, which he could only dimly understand. "I am sorry, Gerald; I thought I could *trust* you. Why didn't you ask for a piece of sugar instead of taking it?" "Dear, didn't you know that Baby would cry, if you took away her toy? You must think another time. I know you wouldn't be *unkind* to Baby, if you knew." "You *are* a help to me," Nurse said one day, after he had—very reluctantly, it must be confessed—gone a message for her; and he wished he had gone more gladly, and made up his little mind that next time he would.

One day, when Nurse was out of the room, Gerald was tempted to throw some paper upon the fire to make a big blaze. He knew this was forbidden, and he understood why. The draught quickly carried the burning paper up the chimney, and no charred remains were left in the hearth to tell the tale of his wrongdoing. But the flaming paper, borne so swiftly out of his sight, had frightened him, and he knew he had done wrong. Yet he forgot all

about it, as Nurse helped him into bed, chatting brightly as usual. Prayers were said, the light was out, and Nurse had left him for sleep, when the thought of his disobedience returned. He began to feel a "horrid pain inside"; and the pain wouldn't go; and at last he had to call Nurse to him and confess.

"Nurse," he said, "I want to tell you something. I threw a big paper on the fire when you weren't there this evening, and I knew I mustn't, and I'm sorry."

Nurse's arms were around him. "I'm so glad you told me the truth about it," she said; and from the tone of her voice he knew that "to tell the truth," under such circumstances, was, somehow, one of the very best things he could possibly do.

Truth, trust, kindness, love, helpfulness, unselfishness: in his daily experience the boy soon knew well enough what these words meant, for, by doing, he had learned to understand. He was conscious of the glad inner feeling, which follows on right-doing, when he was "trusted," or when Nurse said he had been "helpful," "kind," or "unselfish."

He was also beginning, not only to *understand* what was right, but to *desire* to do it—chiefly, at first, to please the nurse whom he so loved; but, more and more, as he grew older, because right-doing, in itself, made him happier.

He was learning to know the right, and to love the

right ; and, though he often failed, he was gradually gaining that power of self-control which would enable him to do what was right, when once he understood. The ultimate sanction of right-doing he was coming to find increasingly within *himself*, in what we speak of as his self-approval or disapproval, even, at times, independently of the approval or disapproval of others.

Had Nurse trained him otherwise than by gaining his co-operation ; had she awed him into obedience by her sharp commanding tone, by a fear of retribution following quickly on the heels of every small act of disobedience—Gerald for a time would probably have done " what he was told," because he dared not do aught else ; but he would have acted under compulsion, without understanding, and without desire. With his strong will and his capacity for reason, he would soon have outgrown the authority which had power to control him in babyhood ; and as long as moral desire slumbered, the " inner vision " would be dim, the commanding call of conscience muffled, the consciousness of wrong-doing indefinite and uncertain.

Yet, it is on the strength of this inner vision, on the part of the child, that the reality of his future religious life depends. A capacity for moral response is innate in children ; and it rests with us, as we have seen, either to weaken it, by making it seem as

if goodness and badness were little more than conventions dependent on the changing caprice of upgrown folk ; or to strengthen it, by wise and loving discipline.

And what does it mean to the child that he should come to know the difference between right and wrong in this way, not merely as the result of experiences which can be more or less automatically analysed and compared, but as the result of an inner sanction, which grows ever clearer, as he grows stronger, wiser, and more loving ? Does it not mean an increasing realisation that his body is the Temple of the Most High ; that the power of God is to be found within, as well as without ? Does it not mean a gradual realisation on our part, as well as on his, of the true inwardness of all action—a realisation that his outward acts are dependent on an invisible something within ; that, in the end, his act *is* his will ? And when—having, at times, used his will wrongly—he becomes, through his growing desire for the right, aware of failure ; does he not, at the same time, feel that it was in his power to *act* differently, if only he had *willed* differently ? in his power, because he is conscious of something higher than himself at work within him, urging him on towards right-willing and right-doing ? And is not the very consciousness of failure, in connection with such a realisation, a spur to higher effort on the child's part ?

Were there no light, there could be no darkness ; and the clearer the shining of the sun, the blacker the shadow. It is the love of right which *creates* the hatred of wrong, when once it is felt to be such.

Some children are born good, others have to grow good under the influence of a compelling environment—but long-continued forcing never inspired anyone with a love of right doing. "The secret of help is encouragement." It is by the constraining influence of a discerning *love ;* it is by the unconscious influence of our own example, after we have awakened such *love ;* it is by the power of prayer, when God is known and *loved*—that right desire is gradually strengthened ; until the voice of conscience —the Divine Impulse from within urging us forward —becomes ever more clearly heard, and the "Will" learns to overcome the "Wish."

And all is accomplished through the power of a wise *love*—the love which the child has learnt, step by step, as far back as he can remember, which ought always to show itself in deeds, and not only in words. Since he loved Nurse, he was expected to do what he could to help her, and not to let her do everything for him. And though not always very willing, the result of his experience had been (though he could not have put it into words) that he had grown to love his nurse more through the giving of help, even though

sometimes it was against the grain. *Love grew by what it gave more than by what it received:* that was one of the big lessons that life had already taught him.

And this experience of his, in connection with human love, he is now capable of realising in connection with his love for God—the love which has been daily growing stronger, as God has been increasingly revealed.

But neither the desire, nor the power, to obey God in love comes all at once, any more than the desire and the power to obey his nurse, or his earthly parents, came all at once. It implies, as we have seen, a considerable development of will, which is partly the result of training from without, partly of a growing capacity for self-mastery. "I don't want to hear it," Lewis used to say, when, as a little lad, it was suggested to him that he could know what was the right thing to do, by listening to the "still small voice" within; and, a year later, he still "wished it was the right thing to be selfish," for, though he could no longer ignore the inner monitor, its dictates warred with his natural impulse to keep, and not to give. But, gradually, his point of view changed; the power to do right grew stronger.

When he was five years old, he was staying with his mother in the country, and some visitors were coming to spend the day with them. He had been

promised that he should go, with the others, to the station to meet them. But the farmhouse, at which they were staying, was two miles away, and on that particular day, Lewis, who was not very strong, showed evident signs of fatigue. His mother knew that it would be best for him to wait at the house with her instead of going to meet the visitors, as he had been promised: but she also knew that it would be a great disappointment. The problem was how to deny Lewis the treat, without arousing in him anger, or distress, almost as exhausting for him as the long walk. It happened that "Onward, Christian soldiers" was, at this time, Lewis' favourite hymn; and to be a Christian soldier, as far as he understood what it meant, was his ideal. He had already realised that it meant running little messages, when he was asked, controlling his temper, bravery over small hurts—even bravery when dogs had to be passed in the road! When he was quite little, dogs had been his one great dread; but, saying to himself the chorus of the hymn "Onward, Christian soldiers," bravely, he had managed to pass them by. Now he was called upon to do what was, for the moment, even harder. "Lewis," his mother began, "you know what it means, don't you, to be a Christian soldier—a soldier in God's army?" "Yes," answered the little lad, in a subdued tone, fearing what might be coming next. "Well," his mother

went on, "I want you to be a Christian soldier today over a very hard thing"—she paused, then added quietly: "I want you to stay here with me and not go to the station with the rest: are you man enough to be a Christian soldier about that?" The little lad was quiet for a few minutes, turning his head away to hide his quivering lips; then, bravely, he looked back at his mother. "Yes, I can," he said.

It was Sunday morning, and the younger children were gathered together in the nursery for a little service. It happened that, a short time before, two of the children had been quarreling, but, by the time service began, a temporary truce had been declared. "Purge out of every heart the lurking grudge" came the beautiful words of one of R. L. Stevenson's prayers; and Robert, magnanimous at heart, though ever the aggressive one in quarrels, heard, echoed, and understood. As he rose from his knees, he whispered to his mother: "May I tell Martha, now, that I'm sorry? I'd got a 'grudge' against her myself."

Love should manifest itself in service; and it is our fault if we have unwittingly given our child a conception of life which makes this realisation difficult.

When the little lad, whose diary is given by Professor Sully, in his book *Studies of Childhood*, was

nearly six, and his mother had occasion to remonstrate with him on his naughty ways, "I can't make out," the child said, "how it is that God doesn't *make* us good. I pray to Him to make me good." And when his mother urged upon him the necessity of his trying for himself, he added, "Then what's the use of asking God if we have to help ourselves?" Yet Norman was only five when he said: "If He did it all, it would be spoilings!"

"Please God, thank you for this lovely day," prayed six-year-old Robert, "and for all the happy days I've had before it. I thank you, dear Father. There's only one way that everybody, rich and poor, can thank you, and that is, by being kind and good. We can all give you this present of being good; and so make *your* life happy because you make our lives so happy." The child's attitude towards his mother, to whom he owed so much, was reflected in his attitude towards the God, to Whom he owed all.

CHAPTER VI

AT SCHOOL: A WIDER OUTLOOK

The faith of childhood tested in the wider knowledge which comes with a wider life—The increased sensitiveness of adolescence—The Riddle of Life—Strength of character won through personal effort—Gladness found in the strenuous overcoming of difficulty, whereas half-hearted effort leads to weariness and disappointment—The child's attitude towards his troubles—The development of understanding and sympathy—The child's answer to the World-Riddle depends upon the behaviour of upgrown folk—The need for idealism at school, as at home—Special opportunities for mutual helpfulness afforded by school life—School games, societies, camps—Co-operation in school-work—The Boy Scout and Girl Guide movements—Practical religion learnt in the development of the spirit of comradeship.

By the time a child is eight or nine years old, this desire to serve, though intermittent in its expression, should have become an integral part of his religious life, springing naturally out of his knowledge and love of God, and in turn reacting upon them. Child though he still is, he should already have begun to realise that religious faith is not merely "a flag" under which he can sail through life, but "a rudder," placed in his hands, by which he can steer his course through difficulty and temptation. In

outline, then, his religious life is now in full process of development, for, in a triple unity of knowledge, of love, and of conscious, willing service, he already has, within himself, the essence of all religion.

In the eyes of grown folk, his religious conceptions are still wondrously simple and undeveloped. "Thank you for trying to make us all happy," prayed Geoffrey, when he was nine, "and please make yourself happy too, if you can; but, if you can't, don't worry." While Margaret, about the same age, reverently added—as a postscript to her evening prayer—"Dear Father, I forgot to say good-night to you properly, and I do hope you will have a good night too."—"It didn't matter my saying that, did it, Mother?" she whispered. "I love God—that's why I hoped He'd have a good night."

"I wish we could draw when we were little babies and first came from God," sighed Jack, "because then we knew *exactly* what He is like; but by the time we are big enough to draw, we have forgotten —so no one ever knows!"

But limited indeed as are the religious conceptions of childhood, we grown folk might envy the child's appreciation and his trust.

"Thank you for making the beautiful world with so much joy. Every little thing in it you have made is so lovely—even the tiny branch of the tree is perfect and makes the world more delightful,"

prayed Robin, when he was eight. And a year later, when, in ripe old age, a beloved grandfather died, he prayed: "Thank you for letting us have Grandfather for such a long time, dear God. He has taught us so many lessons—patience and lots of other lessons. And now that he has worked so hard, I am so glad that he is with you in Heaven, and on your right hand, with all the saints, for Grandfather was a saint. Thank you, Father, for all our blessings."

"Please help me not to grumble to-morrow," Molly prayed once, "but you know it's the first day of the holidays, and it's always hardest on the first day": and another little lass of nine pleaded, "Please help me to remember my dolly better, 'cos I'm not a bit the right sort of mother now!"

"Please God, next time help the poor to be richer, and the rich not to be quite such 'swanks' as they are now, and so make everything fair and equal," was the burden of Lewis' prayer one night. And Maurice specially asked God, again and again, to make "the witches and the burglars" good, because, he added, all unconsciously revealing the Divine Love within his own child nature, "because I do love them all the same."

Glimpses of wrongs which need to be put right, now and again, from afar off, these little ones may have had already; but, for the most part, for the

more fortunate children whose religious development we have been considering here, life has been, until now, almost wholly a beautiful thing. In the human love with which they have been surrounded—in the beauty of Nature—the Father has been revealed; and we, knowing that, soon enough, the disturbing element of sin and suffering must needs come within their ken, have so far sought only to draw their attention to that which was a source of gladness. But now, as the child grows older, and, in the wider life of school, meets with new temptations; as he begins to know more about the world in which he lives, and, at the same time, begins to realise the illimitable vastness of the material universe; the simple conceptions of his childhood, and the naïve prayers which were bound up with them, perforce come to an end—and, with them, somewhat of the unquestioning simplicity of his childlike faith. Yet he needs that faith now as never before; for, with the greater freedom of his growing years, must, of necessity, come a gradually increasing knowledge of the difficulties of life, and of the existence of wrong, in that larger world in which he now begins to play his part. He sees there pitiful poverty, pain, sorrow and sin; he experiences injustice; temptation, at times, proves too hard for him—and, with the added sensitiveness and keener criticism of early adolescence, his whole nature at times rises in revolt. "It

isn't all right with the world, Teacher!" a little lass of twelve cried out pitifully. "How *can* God be in Heaven when it isn't a bit right here?" It was at the time of the great coal strike, and the child had seen a little of what it meant; and it all came back to her when, at school, the song was read from *Pippa Passes*.

Breathless with indignation, Philip ran to his mother. "Oh, Mother," he cried, "was it very wicked of me? I saw a man who was beating his horse dreadfully, and—I laid him down a curse. I couldn't help it, Mother, indeed I couldn't help it."

What is to help the children now, when, with their newly awakened consciousness, they come—some of them, perhaps, for the first time—face to face with what are, even for us grown folk, the well-nigh inscrutable riddles of life? For if this world of ours is God's world; if a Loving and Almighty Father has not only created it, but rules over it still; then why injustice, sorrow and sin, pain and suffering?

No answer can be adequate which does not in some way spring out of the child's own experience. But what can a boy, or a girl, of eleven or twelve have learnt with regard to the difficulties of life, to help their childhood's faith now to withstand the test, which greater freedom must needs put upon it?

Ten-year-old Jeanie, often enough, showed her-

self to be a discontented little lass. Whenever the slightest thing went wrong, she began to frown and to sulk ; and, though she was always sorry for her unseemly behaviour when the cloud of ill-feeling had passed away, for she wanted to be different, yet, with years, the habit of discontent was growing upon her, and robbing her life of joy, and the lives of those around her. Nothing short of a persistent and determined effort on her part was likely to make any appreciable difference. So, with her mother's help, a definite plan of campaign was sketched. Under her own eyes, the child was to see the battle fought between the opposing forces of her discontent and the army of sunshiny spirits that dwells within each one of us, though in Jeanie's case they were a very small army, and often sadly in need of recruits !

On either side of a wide green valley, pictured on a large sheet of paper on her wall, the two forces lay encamped ; and any morning or afternoon on which she was " content," the child painted in one scarlet-coated soldier, marching boldly to the front. Sometimes, the new soldier in red came face to face with a black one all too soon, for the bad habit was deeply rooted, and the dark men often left their tents before the child had time to think about it ! But the battle was eager, and she was trying hard ; and the very thought of the existence within her of the two

opposing camps was many a time sufficient at once to chase away the frown which still came readily to her brow. The red-chalked soldiers began to cluster thickly on the field, and, according to the rules of war laid down in the beginning, whenever the proportion of red soldiers to black was seven to one, a black soldier could be killed. So, week by week, the black soldiers were buried; and, day by day, the scarlet army added to its numbers—until, at last, when the war had lasted over many months, those dark soldiers dared no longer stir from their tents, while the army of sunshiny spirits mustered in ever brighter array! Discontent had been conquered, self-control gained; and the child had enjoyed the battle. Through personal effort, strength of character had been won; and when the struggle was over, she knew the effort to have been well worth while.

Ronald, too, gained control through personal effort, working—at the age of eleven—for a junior scholarship. Naturally passionate and rebellious, impatient in overcoming difficulties, inaccurate and wanting in thoroughness, he was difficult to deal with at home and at school. He lacked self-control, while at the same time he possessed strong impulses, which needed to be kept well in hand. Every day, while he worked for his scholarship, a little bit of careful work had to be done, generally against his

will. Subject after subject had to be studied, until each one was brought up to scholarship standard. At first, the very regularity of the grind was an effort to him. Gradually, he accepted that, as part of the inevitable discipline of life, but his heart was not yet in his work. His "Wish" tended in one direction, his "Will" had to be set in another and contrary direction. He was like a boy training to win the cup of honour at his school sports, training dutifully because those interested in him desired him to win, but all the while keen on something else! But, gradually, he began to make headway; difficulties vanished as knowledge grew; subjects became more interesting; and, in spite of himself, he began to care for his work. Not only did he learn to become a worker at school, but the self-mastery gained in the one direction spread in other directions. That morning hour of work, done in spite of the temptation to play cricket or rounders, strengthened his will, so that he was able to resist other temptations. He became more responsive, less impatient, less quarrelsome, more thorough. His self-mastery had been acquired by practice; love of work followed the doing of work; doing of right in other directions, the doing of right in the one direction.

One could easily multiply instances, but the lesson is the same in all. The children, through such experiences, learn for themselves that, *in the overcom-*

ing of difficulties by personal effort, strength of character is acquired ; and thus, and only thus, are they in a position to realise that a life free from difficulty, a life making no call for persistent effort, would not be, for any of us, the best of all possible lives.

For not only would character suffer, but there would be less of joy in the world : the youngest child knows there is ever a sense of exhilaration in using our capacity to do that which is difficult.

At every interval in school time, Roger ran to a tree at the bottom of the playground, eager to climb, because the other boys and girls at school could do so. Day after day, all alone, manfully he strove, and one day conquered—climbing as high into its branches as any of the others. And even though, that day, he fell, breaking his leg, he gloried in the thought of his victory !

" Don't help me ; please, don't help me, Teacher," cries the eager little learner, as she puzzles over a difficult problem in arithmetic. " I do want to try to do it all by myself " : child though she is, she is already keenly aware of the joy of conquest.

" I want to do something big to help somebody," sighed Donald, as he stood looking over the sea, in his new scout's uniform. " I wish I could find someone who was drowning, and then save him " : for he too longed, in his way, to show forth in action what he felt it was in his power to do.

The child cricketer strives to play like a man ; he does not want to play with a soft ball lest a hard ball might hurt him ! He does not want the rules of the game made easier for him, just because he is a little chap ! He welcomes the strain and the stress, and, bit by bit, trains himself to " endure hardness."

And such children will surely understand when we tell them that Life itself is but a larger, nobler game, with its own " rules "—" rules " which, in our grown-up phraseology, we call " moral principles "—understand that, in that Game, we are called upon, in school-boy language, not to " fool around," but to play our part like men. They know the value, and the joy, of effort—in games, in scoutcraft, or at their lessons ; they are eager to practise bowling and batting that their side may win in the match, eager to earn " badges," eager to win prizes. These things they feel instinctively to be worth while—but other things will also seem to them worth while, as they gradually grow in their power of moral response. Such children will grasp the point that, if it is derogatory to their growing manhood to set them easier sums, or to let them off when they are " caught out " in a game of cricket—then it is also derogatory arbitrarily to reward their acts of virtue, or to " make up " to them for disappointments by the giving of extraneous " treats," and so make life artificially easy.

The cocoon of a rare and exquisite butterfly was once sent to a young naturalist. Weary of waiting for the creature to burst the bars of its own prison, and fearing lest, in the processes of Nature, some hitch had occurred, he very slightly lengthened the opening in the cocoon with his penknife, and, in a very few days, the butterfly emerged. But, to his surprise, it was quite ordinary-looking, a dull drab in colour. The fact was that its glory of colouring could only be won in a prolonged struggle for liberty —a struggle which had been cut short by the young naturalist's untimely interference.

And the children know that, whether in school-work, in games, or in their own moral life, it is slackness, and not persistent striving, which wearies and disappoints, which takes all the "colour" out of life; half-hearted effort, and not the combined effort of heart, head, and hand, which fails. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy *heart* and with all thy *soul*, and with all thy *mind*, and with all thy *strength*," said the Great Teacher; and the children have begun to know for themselves what that means.

In their own limited experience, they know that the surmounting of difficulties, the resisting of temptation, the brave endurance of pain or of sorrow, help to make men of them; they know, too, that when such sorrow, pain, and difficulty are met in the

spirit of rising to them, and not sinking under them, they no longer depress, but stimulate to higher effort; and in the possession of this knowledge, which is their very own, garnered with our help from their own precious experience, they now look out on life with different eyes.

They know, too, from their own experience, what a difference they can make in their troubles, whether at school or at home, by the attitude which they assume towards them.

If the day is wet, and cricket is out of the question, then the boy becomes reconciled to the rain, if he only remembers that it is an opportunity for him to arrange his stamps in his stamp album!

If the young cricketer is all too soon bowled out, then he too feels reconciled, if he only dwells on the fact that, this time, he has managed not to make a "duck"; or perhaps, if he *has* made one, not shown how cross he felt!

Jack lightened his heart, though he burdened his body, when he carried all the mackintoshes!

Molly found happiness for herself, when, thinking of others, she removed the word SELF, section by section, from the sheet on the wall.

Judith was disappointed because the pouring rain had resulted in the postponement of a long-

anticipated picnic ; and as long as she dwelt on her troubles, she felt increasingly miserable. But she discovered that, when once she put her own sorrow out of her mind, and found something to do for somebody, her "spirit of heaviness" was changed for a "spirit of rejoicing."

"If you stand at the side of a field of young wheat, looking crossways," Thring said once in an address to schoolgirls—"looking athwart the furrows, there is total, absolute, hopeless confusion ; the most intellectual man that ever lived, or shall live, shall not find any order, or disentangle the endless maze ; but a child, standing at the end of the field, and following humbly the track of the sower with his eye, sees by sight the whole plan at once."

It is our point of view which makes all the difference. We can all, if we choose, make our difficulties our delights. We can all, if we choose, acquire the habit of dwelling on the blessings rather than on the troubles of life, of seeing the silver lining of hope rather than the dark cloud of disappointment. We can all, if we choose, acquire the habit of desiring that our strength may prove sufficient for our tasks, rather than our tasks be ever nicely adjusted to what we think to be our strength. We can all, if we choose, deliberately stand with our back to the shadow, that we may be glad in the sunshine. These truths we are surely right in stating to that section

of the nation's children which I have been dealing with here.

Again and yet again, such children can, if they will, make the discovery, that it is their *attitude* that makes all the difference to any troubles which they may be called upon to face.

"God *wants* us all to be happy, doesn't He, Mother?" questioned one among them, who was a little philosopher by nature, "only He can't make you happy, however much He tries, as long as you are selfish." And the children know that, were it not for trouble and difficulty, we should have many fewer chances of acquiring that unselfishness which, in the battle of life, we so greatly need.

From the discipline of life, then, more is to be won than strength of character. Out of the struggle, understanding and sympathy should have been born; and, when once they reign within the heart, sorrow, pain, and difficulty are robbed of half their bitterness. "When (pain) takes her true place before the altar of the infinite, she casts off her dark veil and bares her face to the beholder as a revelation of supreme joy."[1] Somewhat of this we grown folk should have learnt, but can the children yet understand it?

I believe that the children are capable of under-

[1] *Sadhana*, by Rabindranath Tagore.

standing, in so far as, in their experience, it has been true—but the experiences of too many children stand out in marked contradiction.

Ronald, for instance, was the "black sheep" of his family. Continually, fresh punishments were devised for him by his parents, in the hopes of effecting an improvement; but all to no avail. As a matter of fact, punishment only seemed to make him worse. Thus, one day, when, for some misdemeanour, he was sent to bed, he tore the sheets into ribbons, and broke all in the room he could lay his hands on! Yet, hardened sinner though he was, he was the soul of honesty; and his heart was tender.

One day, a sister, a few years younger than himself, broke a valuable piece of china; and, fearing to confess to her mother, she made a confidant of her scapegrace brother. As a result of his persuasion, she confessed her fault; and, greatly to her surprise, she was not punished; she was not even scolded! Her mother only told her that she was very, very sorry—the more so as the broken china could never be replaced. Delighted at her escape, she ran to tell her brother all about it, expecting him to be equally pleased with herself! "Oh, Molly, how dreadful!" was the lad's only comment —he was thirteen years old at the time—"Did you cry? I would rather have been punished a thou-

sand times than see Mother sorry like that; I couldn't bear that at all."

Yet Ronald was the "black sheep" of that family, for whom increasingly severe punishments were ever continually devised! And all his life, in spite of the essential honesty of his nature, in spite of the tender heart hidden away underneath, Ronald remained the "black sheep," for understanding and sympathy were never shown him.

Lewis was intellectually slow, and all his work at school came hardly to him. Neat and careful writing he found especially difficult, and his exercise books were a disgrace to his form! One Easter holiday, however, following the suggestion of his home people, he made a valiant effort to improve; and, for three half-hours daily, he practised careful writing. At the end of the three weeks, a marked difference was apparent, though the time had not been sufficient to form in him the *habit* of good penmanship. Eagerly he returned to school, ready to continue in his efforts, and glad of the opportunity of showing to his teacher how much he had improved. But day after day passed, and "she never noticed," he said sadly; until, owing to her lack of appreciation, he gradually ceased to respond any longer to the call for persistent effort which good writing required. The teacher had missed her opportunity: and for Lewis, in this particular experience of his at

school—as for Ronald, all through his life—understanding and sympathy had not been the outcome of Life's discipline.

It is indeed a responsible thing to be "grown up," for the child's answer to the world's riddle—if only we trace it back to its beginnings—rests ultimately upon his experience with us.

For the slow children, never far from the bottom of the class; for the thoughtless children, constantly falling short in their behaviour; for the obstinate, the untruthful, the passionate children—all in some way "difficult" to deal with, because handicapped by force of circumstances or from birth—the discipline of life, in the home and at school, is ofttimes too severe, unless it is accompanied by our understanding help.

Everywhere, in our relations with the children, idealism is demanded of us—at school fully as much as in the home. Not by their achievements, but always by their efforts, should such children, as far as possible, be judged—and the effort put forward consciously by us, to enter into and appreciate the efforts put forward by them, will pave the way, in school as at home, for a mutual understanding, which will inevitably blossom into mutual sympathy.

"The worse the material," said Thring, "the greater the skill of the worker": and there is not a child, however apparently unlovely and unlovable,

who—in and through the difficulties of his life—should not be drawn closer to those grown folk who are responsible for his upbringing. And only in so far as this is a vital part of his own experience—only in so far as, for him, understanding and sympathy are born out of difficulty—can he enter into the inner meaning of Life's struggle.

Janet, seven years old, had been sent to buy some biscuits, and, out of the money given her, there was $6\frac{1}{2}d.$ in change. On her way home, she passed an old woman selling water-lilies at $\frac{1}{2}d.$ each. The temptation was great; and Janet, not strong enough to resist, bought one lily. When she got home—afraid to tell—she hid the lily in a corner of her bedroom, and gave her mother the $6d.$ change. But no questions were asked: it would never have occurred to her mother to doubt the child's honesty. Janet felt increasingly uneasy; she hated the sight of the water-lily; she felt lonely and miserable; but she was still afraid to tell. More and more depressed she grew, until at last she sought out her mother and told her what she had done: and then —her mother's arms were round her, her mother's tender voice comforted her, told her how glad she was that, at last, she had confessed, and helped her to believe that, another time, with God's help, she would be strong enough to resist. Janet, at that moment, knew her mother's love and the blessed-

ness of forgiveness, as perhaps never before. "To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." So said the Master: and, out of Janet's repentance, grew a stronger, surer love.

A family of little ones lived for weeks with their parents on the verge of physical starvation, owing to a financial crisis due to an unforeseen mishap in business; but Love ruled in the household, and, during all those weeks, each went out of his way to show kindly feeling to the other—not a jarring note was struck to make the trouble harder than it was. And born of that trouble, there came a surer mutual love and trust. The youngest child learnt that there was something good, something even to be thankful for, in that terrible experience: "before the altar of the infinite" trouble had "bared her face as a revelation of supreme joy."

In another family, where, again, Love reigned, the mother's health was, for a time, undermined. And the result? The children, each one, began to watch for opportunities of helpfulness, and striving together to lighten the burden on the mother's shoulders, they made life a happier and an easier business for all concerned. And the mother knew, as each child knew, that her loss of health had entailed a greater gain; for sympathy had grown out of trouble—that sympathy which enriches life, and deepens understanding.

School life affords countless opportunities for such mutual sympathy and mutual helpfulness. Camps, societies, games, all promote the spirit of comradeship and of unselfish interest, which is of the very essence of religion, and which makes life altogether a cheerier and a better business. Not on the special capacity of any single individual, but on the harmonious co-operation of all, does the success of the various school enterprises depend, and everybody is of necessity called upon to be in a measure unselfish, and in the end to spend himself in controlling and helping others.

But the mutual helpfulness, which reigns outside the class-room, has, in the majority of our modern schools, no place within. There, not "each for all and all for each," but "each for himself, and the hindmost remain behind" is still the motto. For an embargo is laid by school authorities on *co-operation in work*, with the result that, whereas the few brilliant boys, who climb to the top, receive the honour of prizes and certificates, the dull and the stupid, the lazy and the less robust, are left behind, in hopelessness and confusion, where the "devil" of slackness or disappointment may take them. If the same spirit of eager comradeship and kindly helpfulness, the same desire that the "whole," and not only isolated individuals, should excel, which prevails on the playing field and in camp life, could

only be incorporated into the daily work of the classroom, any possible loss of intellectual efficiency would be more than compensated for by the greater moral stimulus. Prizes have been abolished in athletic sports, and the result has been increased efficiency and greater keenness: why are they retained in the classroom?

To every method, to every organisation, which teaches the lessons of co-operation, both home and school should hold out a welcoming hand. Supreme among these stand the School Camp movement, and the Boy Scout and Girl Guide movements of to-day. In the latter, in one vast world-wide organisation, at once easily understood, practical in its aim, and positive in its appeal, the highest ideals of life have been embodied. A scout's *duty* is to be useful and to help others. A scout is a friend to *all*, no matter to what social class they belong. A scout is courteous to *all*. A scout smiles or whistles under all difficulties, never "grouses" at hardships, nor whines at other people, nor swears when put out! A scout promises on his honour to be loyal to his God, as to his King. The attitude of mind which prepares the child to face, with gradually increasing confidence, the Riddle of Life, finds a practical embodiment in this Scout Law.

Not the overcoming of difficulty, not the endurance of pain, not the showing forth of capacity, as

ends in themselves, can teach the highest lessons of Life—but rather endurance with and for others ; effort with and for others—for these develop understanding, generate sympathy, and lessen, all along the line, the strain of life.

This we believe for ourselves ; this we desire that the child should learn, as a result of his own experience—and when learnt, this must needs influence his judgment, as he looks out upon a troublous world.

CHAPTER VII

THE CALL FOR FAITH

Sorrow may crush and failure may embitter—The pathos in human life—The "Game of Life" and games at school—The part played by the human will—True happiness ever dependent on glad and free right-doing—The answer to Life's Riddle—"The Practice of the Presence of God"—The importance of habit in religious life—The necessity of discipline in creating habit—But discipline must be self-imposed—The influence of our own religious life upon that of the child—Co-workers with God.

Only in some such interpretation of the simple experiences of their own lives can the children, whose religious development we have been considering, seek for a solution of the world problem. In their own lives, they see that the call to effort stimulates; the conquering of wrong desire strengthens; the cheery facing of difficulty braces; the brave endurance of sorrow sweetens. They see, too, that, when trouble and pain are borne and effort is put forth, not merely as ends in themselves, but with and for other people, a deeper understanding and a kindlier sympathy blossoms forth. In their own lives, and in the lives of those near and dear to them, Love explains Life; and behind the injustice, behind the sorrow and sin, the pain and suffering—

with our understanding help—they can see a purposive Love.

Yet sometimes—and such children cannot but see this as well—difficulties crush rather than rouse to effort; trouble and pain, instead of awakening sympathy, sour and embitter, making people unloving and discontented. Little children are oppressed, dumb animals ill-treated; men and women debase themselves with drink, or allow passion to overcome them. In the midst of civilisation, there is savagery; and the worst part of it all is that those who commit these wrongs often have no sense of regret for their wrong-doing, to rouse them to do differently. Taking into account, to the utmost, the value of effort; taking into account, to the utmost, the healing power of understanding and sympathy—we cannot say to these children that "all is right with the world." Can we help them, in this matter too, so to interpret Life that, even in view of all this, they may yet continue to believe in the Great Father, as they did in childhood?

In many of our English schools, games are compulsory. Of necessity, the players are unequally gifted, for some are "born" to cricket or football, and some, to the end, play feebly, however hard they try. But all are instructed in the rules of the game: all receive at the start some training: and, in their

spare moments, the better players are glad to "coach" the poorer ones, helping them somewhat to improve their play. For, in the ultimate success of the game, even the feebler players count: they may make the run which serves just to turn the scale, or help the ball a few yards forward towards the goal. Those who, physically, are totally unfit for games, are allowed exemption; and each player, whether good or bad, learns, at any rate, to play for his side rather than for himself. It therefore follows that, when each one, strong or weak, puts his whole heart into the game, all goes smoothly and harmoniously enough, in spite of uneven handicaps. But the purpose of the game is certain to be spoilt, however brilliant the individual play, whenever selfishness enters in, whenever the decision of the umpire is disputed, or the rules of the game are ignored.

And Life itself, as the child has already realised, is just a grander and a bigger Game, in which each one of us is compelled, willy-nilly, to play some part. In Life, too, the capacity of the players is unequal—only, however heavy the handicap, physical, mental, or moral, no exemptions are allowed. Some, too, in Life, have no chance of learning the "rules" of the Game: some never receive instruction: and this is what makes the Game for many so hard. If only the better players, in Life as at school, gave more time to "coaching" the poorer ones, remembering

that the weakest among them, in the end, may "count": if only, in Life as at school, the Game were played less for self and more for all: if only, in Life as at school, those who did know the rules, unselfishly obeyed them: if only, where the handicap was heavy, the others understood and made allowances—why, then, in spite of uneven handicaps, would Life's Game prove so hard? would it not, perhaps for most, then go smoothly enough, as do the games at school? But in Life, too many play for "self" only, and too few understand: too many, even among those who know the "rules," neglect to keep them, spoiling the Game, not only for others, but also for themselves: too many quarrel, intent on a personal issue, when they might be putting their whole hearts into a bigger Game—and, instead of harmony, there is discord: instead of "goodwill amongst men," there is cruelty and oppression and poverty.

But have we any right to say that, if there were a Loving Father, He would not permit this? Can we, with our limited outlook and capacity, judge of the ultimate issues of a Game, of which we know little, save what is going on just in our tiny portion of the field—know nothing of what will follow, when Life's Game has been played out? Would we have the Father, Who, in His infinite wisdom, has laid down the "rules," for the sake of harmony, make of us puppets who could do nought else but obey them?

Would not the meaning of the Game be gone, if our freedom were forfeited? If we were able to be *made* good, would it be real goodness? May it not be better that, through the experience of discord, we should learn *voluntarily*, each one, so to play our part that, for all, harmony may at last be attained?

> "God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear";

and one and all, they tell us that we have a *right to believe* that there is One Who knows and understands; that when He judges, our responsibility will be measured, not by our achievement, but by our faithfulness; that for the "infinite pathos of human life" there is, somewhere, "infinite sympathy"—or why should we—men, women, and children—care as we do?

> "Do I find love so full in my nature—God's ultimate gift,
> That I doubt his own love can compete with it? Here the parts shift?
> Here, the creature surpass the creator—the end, what began?
> Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,
> And dare doubt he alone shall not help him who yet alone can?"

And the child knows that those players who get "the best" out of a game, are those who, playing their hardest, loyally and unselfishly strive to grasp and to obey the rules, manfully accepting the consequences—and he will understand that it is the same in Life. True happiness is ever dependent on glad and free right doing.

To the Riddle of Life there can be no complete answer; but, out of the heart of each child's own experience, comes a suggestion and a call: a suggestion, pregnant with meaning, that, probably, *on the loyal and unselfish attitude of the players* depends the glory and success of the Game; and a call to "Play up and play the game," leaving to God, like Norman, "the last little bit that he can't manage."

An attitude such as this, on the part of the child, is, however, only natural, if life is permeated through and through with a sense of God, and this demands the definite cultivation of our own spiritual life, as well as that of the child; and such cultivation demands persistent effort.

I believe that every child possesses, as part of his natural inheritance, a certain degree of spiritual responsiveness, in the same way that he possesses a power to respond in other directions—physical, mental, and moral—to the environment in which he is placed. But those who fail to exercise the muscles of their body, lose the power properly to employ them; and stories of those who have been compelled to live in a condition of comparative darkness, show that eyes cease, under such circumstances, to respond effectively to the stimulus of light; while "wild children," who have been abducted from their natural homes and have grown up in

the sole presence of animals, and, at a later period of childhood, have been rescued, are invariably found to have lost the capacity for acquiring any power of speech, and can only communicate their feelings by animal cries.[1] The child's power of spiritual response is, in the same way, dependent upon the call which, from childhood upwards, is made upon it. By means of language, by means of a right use of play, step by step, we grown folk help to develop the mental capacity of childhood; by means of nourishing food, of regular sleep, and of healthy atmospheric conditions, we help to develop the physical capacity. And, as we have seen, by means of our own religious life, calling forth a similar life in the child, we, from without, can develop that spiritual responsiveness, which we have reason to believe is within.

But before any natural capacity whatever can be strengthened, or even saved from atrophy, deliberate cultivation is necessary. Only, in this process of cultivation, great care needs to be exercised. It is possible, I believe, unduly to stimulate, and so to injure, the growing organism, in the realm of the spiritual, as in the realm of the physical, mental, and moral.

Granted, however, the exercise of such care;

[1] *Journey through the Province of Oude*, by Sir William Steeman.

granted that we are seeking not to impose upon the child, from without, something which is foreign to his childhood, but to educate, from within, that which is his by nature ; it is our bounden duty, as we have nourished his physical and mental life with suitable food, so to nourish his spiritual life—first, through our conversation, weaving the thought of God, day by day, into the very texture of his life ; and then by forming in him habits of daily communion with God in prayer. The importance of habit in connection with the child's religious life can hardly be over-estimated. "Unite habit with religion," wrote the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone to his son, and it is a fact which is borne out by experience, that, out of definite and conscious communion, there ever springs a more intimate knowledge of God.

It is well that the child, as he grows older, should understand, for himself, the necessity of discipline, in religion as in all else. It will be no new thought to him that he can only excel in cricket, or in his lessons at school, as the result of definite application—even though, at times, against the grain ; no new thought that the power to express himself, on violin or piano, can only be attained, in so far as he acquires complete command over the instrument, by sheer practice, whether at the time he "feels like it" or not. And he can, therefore, take for granted —what experience will prove to him later—that, in

the same way, spiritual power can only be gained through spiritual application. Habits of prayer need to have been imposed upon the child by grown-up folk from the time when he first began himself to pray—habits which later, either in the form in which they were originally imposed, or in some fresh form which he is now able to choose for himself, he needs voluntarily to accept. For upon habit, in his spiritual life, as in his physical, mental, and moral life, his future character and destiny will depend. But may I once again repeat in this connection, prayer in childhood must never be allowed to become a habit only, a meaningless babble of words, repeated, night and morning, in the attitude of prayer. Prayer, however short, must be real as well as regular; and prayer must be embodied in action.

Habit—discipline—which, as I have said, if it is to retain its value, must before long be self-imposed, is thus an essential element in religion; but, whether the habit will, as the child grows, be other than "mere" habit, depends upon the spirit in which it was imposed from without, when he was younger.

We cannot give what we do not first possess: we cannot help to interpret, unless we ourselves have first understood. We need ourselves to see God "at work in our common days," to hear His voice in the commanding call of duty, to meet Him in the stress

of work, the toil of life—if the child is early to see and hear Him there. Duty must have been renamed, for us, Delight, "on the uplands of God's liberty," if, for the child, it is to be so transformed. Upon the depth and reality of our own religious life will rest, in the beginning, the depth and reality of that of the child. If, like a golden thread woven into the drab fabric of life, the thought of an Unseen Love has permeated all for the child; then, when his naïve conceptions fade in the light of a larger knowledge, when his simple and unquestioning faith is tested by life's strange complexity—then, in its place, will arise a grander and more spiritual conception, a more tried and trusting faith.

Lewis, all unconsciously, had grasped the heart of the matter when he said: "It seems to me as if God is like a Father, Who has sent us away from Him for a time because He wants us to learn a lesson; and some time He will call us back to Him, and if we have done well, He'll be pleased; and if we've done badly"—and his little face grew wistful—"don't you think, Mother," he pleaded, "don't you think He'll give us another chance?"

In the heart of the child's being, God has laid the foundation: the nature of the superstructure reared upon it depends upon the materials we teachers bring, and the conditions which we secure for the building thereon.

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